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# Adventure

Thomson Burtis
Frederick R. Bechdolt
Hugh Pendexter
Barry Scobee
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# Adventure

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*


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## Four Novelettes

AFTER five years in the pen on a false charge, "*Peace River*" *Parker* unknowingly entered the service of his chief enemy as sheepherder, and so found himself involved in a crooked deal which aimed to put his best friends out of business. "PEACE MEDICINE" is a complete novelette by W. C. Tuttle in the next issue.

DEATH and destruction. The scuppers running blood. The acrid fumes of powder, shots, the clink of steel against steel, a mob of men grim-set to hold their vessel. That was life for *Jean Lafitte*, corsair, on the Gulf of Mexico. "THE BLACK BANNER," is a complete novelette by J. Allan Dunn in the next issue.

IT WAS no secret that *Orafo-Ekta's* fondest ambition was to wear trousers and white men's boots. That ambition turned out to be connected in an unexpected way with the visit which the oil-trader *Kingdon* paid to the fearsome "leopard-juju" village of Ekaba. "WHITE MAN'S BOOTS," a novelette of the Niger Delta, by Robert Simpson, complete in the next issue.

WHEN rustled cattle were found on the ranch of *Louis Bern* and *Thad Wyman*, the two partners were arrested at the instance of their old enemy—*Barnhill*. The murder of *Valdez*, a Mexican rancher who could have proved their innocence, made their conviction almost certain, but—*Deputy Light* was their friend. "ACID TEST," by Edwin Hunt Hoover, is a novelette of the West, complete in the next issue.

*Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.*

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April 30 1923 Adventure Volume 40 No. 3

# Groody Hesitates A While

## A Complete Novel

## By THOMSON BURTIS

*Author of "Flight," "Help from Heaven," etc.*

THE LANKY, loose-jointed form of First Lieutenant George Groody, Air Service, emerged from the shadowed cloisters of headquarters, Donovan Field, Texas, into the hot golden sunlight. In one corner of his thin, firm mouth hung his customary long, attenuated cigar. In his hand he was holding a very precious document. It signified that his resignation as an officer of the Air Service had been accepted and that as soon as he had called on a few officials and proved to them that he had no unpaid bills he would be Mr. George Groody—no address.

The adjutant, a rotund and dignified young man who strove to make up in serious and conscientious deportment what he lacked in age and experience, strode importantly out the door. Sanders had not yet recovered from the honor which the C. O. had thrust upon him of holding down a desk in headquarters.

"Sorry to see you go, Groody," he said.

"Uh huh. Undoubtedly Japan'll attack just as soon as they hear I'm no longer one of Uncle Sam's hired men," returned Groody.

Sanders was constitutionally unable to understand persiflage of this nature, which was one of the mental traits which made him an inevitable adjutant.

Groody moved slowly up the shining white road, past a long line of huge white hangars to his right and an equally precise row of equally white quarters on his left.

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He lounged along like a long-legged, ruminative crane. His Stetson, as usual, was tilted slightly over one eye, and shaded a lean, hawk-like countenance which was tanned to the color of mahogany. The mouth which held the drooping cigar was sardonic and firm, and above the jutting, high-bridged nose his gray eyes, puckered slightly against the sun, were like narrow slits in the thin face. There was a subtle spirit of perverse mockery about that face. It was the face of a man who was at once the eternal boy and yet a man to whom the years had brought cynicism with experience.

He removed his cigar and set it in the other corner of his mouth. So at last he had it, he reflected with a glance at the paper in his hand. He grinned, and suddenly crooked lines from nostrils to the corners of his mouth leaped into being. One of them detoured from a straight course, and finally curved around the mouth at a considerably greater distance from the corner than its mate. This peculiarity gave a one-sided appearance to Groody's smile, and increased immeasurably the ironic quality thereof.

He was thinking about the events leading up to that resignation. For months he had been fretting. The call of far-off places had been sounding in his ears with increasing strength. For years he had been a joyous adventurer in places and climes around the earth, and as the lure of the Air Service grew weaker his thoughts, as those of his kind always have and always will, turned to paths which led around the world and back again.

It had been one sunny morning two months before that he had been moved to take off in a De Haviland for a lonesome flight, planning to work off his discontent by putting the big ship through complicated maneuvers such as he had been noted for ever since his days as chief combat instructor at Issouden. Suddenly the thought had come to him that it would be pleasant to fly to Laredo, which was one of the stations of the border patrol. The wish was father to the deed. Without the formality of letting the Field know where its ship had gone, he had set out for Laredo.

On the way he had espied on the ground a man and a woman who appeared to be the captives of four horsemen bound for the Rio Grande. Having been a member of the border patrol for many months, Groody had formed the habit of being curious. So he had landed some miles from the party, worked his way back to them, surveyed the situation from a distance and then walked in for an investigation. He was possessed of considerable authority by reason of a cocked Colt and his use of the element of surprize.

He had found that Padre Joy, formerly an Army chaplain, and his daughter had been made captive and were being taken into Mexico to show a renegade Mexican the exact location of some platinum mines which the young spig's father had willed to Joy before he died in gratitude for Joy's services in helping him out of Mexico when Huerta and all his following had been deposed. The son having proved a traitor to his father and his cause, had no share in the mines, which were newly discovered.

Joy was an ex-major of wide fame, now resigned for the purpose of developing his property. He had been awaiting the arrival of the old Spanish mining-engineer with whom he was to develop his property. He and his daughter had been taken captive while on a morning ride.

Groody had succeeded in getting the Joys to his ship, and in taking off with them for Laredo. A newly arrived member of the band of outlaws had shot at them while taking off, and as a result there had been a matter of fire and a forced landing and wreck which had left the Joys unhurt, but which had put Groody to bed for many weeks.

The fact that his achievement became known the country over and that he was a newspaper hero for days did not affect the fact that he must stand a court-martial for having taken a ship without permission and started for the border. So Groody, his mind finally made up, had walked into headquarters within five minutes of his arrival at Donovan Field, and put in his resignation.

That had been three weeks before. Now, reflected Groody, there were several things to be attended to. Tom Service, his sidekick in a hundred enterprises, ranging from service in a South American army to tricks in the forecastle of evil-smelling South Sea tramps, was in San Francisco. The quicker he and Tom could foregather the better. That meant greasing the wheels of Army machinery so that he could get away with a minimum of delay.

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Another matter was that of money. Having paid the best tailor in San Antonio $347 for three suits of civilian clothes and spent the rest of his bankroll for other needed items of attire, he possessed only his paycheck, which was now reposing in his pocket.

He glanced at his watch. It was nearly twelve o'clock. He wended his way into the quarters of Lieutenant Bob Cranford and Captain James L. Berry, who were two young gentlemen of gambling propensities. He found them smoking cigarets and cursing the heat and prohibition in equal parts.

"Got it!" announced Groody, waving the accepted resignation. "I'm leaving the Army flat on its back. In order to leave it behind as far as possible, I crave to throw my pay check on the table and have you two rollicking gamboliers do likewise. Then we'll deal a cold hand for the works."

His offer was accepted promptly. Berry put down a check for $297 to equal the paychecks of the two lower-ranking flyers, and then shuffled the cards. Cranford cut them and Groody dealt them. He cocked his hat further forward on his head, took firmer hold of his elongated cigar, and slapped the cards down face up. When the last card made him kings up he picked up the three checks.

"That saves wiring Tom for carfare!" he grinned. "Thanks, and in case I don't see you again——"

There were two firm hand-clasps, two pairs of eyes smiled into his, and he stalked out.

At one o'clock the next afternoon he climbed aboard the Sunset Limited, bound for the Coast. The perfection of his attire could not hide, nor even camouflage the stamp that the years had given him. He was as marked a man among the passengers as he would have been in uniform. The white collar seemed to deepen the brown of his face, and in every lineament of it there was strength and experience. Beside him other men looked white and flabby and overfed—which most of them were.

At El Paso a uniformed boy came down the car calling his name. Groody took the telegram, forwarded from Donovan Field to catch him, and opened it.

Come to Parkerton, West Virginia. Tom.

Five hours later Groody was reversing his route to San Antonio, whence he made his way to New Orleans and then up the coast to Washington. It was the evening of the fourth day when he dropped off the train at a small depot nestling in the mountains and made inquiry for a taxicab. In a moment he was in a Ford and chugging up a steep hill. He had confided his trunk checks to another jehu, to be delivered to the one hotel Parkerton boasted.

Four days' cogitation had left him totally in the dark as to what Service might be doing in a little West Virginia town. Of course, Tom might be up to anything. During the six years they had been separated he might have turned into any known species of business or professional man.

Their standing method of communication had been through Lonny Sadler, who kept a waterfront saloon in San Francisco and whom they had agreed to keep apprized of their general whereabouts. Service had been in San Francisco a month before. What was he doing in this town? Groody lighted a fresh cigar, and grinned slowly. Whatever it was, it would be interesting. Service specialized in interesting things.

## II

THE Parkerton House proved to be a big, rambling edifice having a veranda its full length, fronting the street, on both stories. It was evidently a popular gathering-place, for fully twenty chairs were tilted back on two legs while forty feet decorated the railing. It was on the main street, which was the only paved thoroughfare in town, and just at the edge of the business district. The business district occupied three blocks of stores. The town had the barren appearance common to its size and location.

An aged bell-hop took his suit-case and led Groody into the dark lobby. A middle-aged clerk with a ragged mustache pushed the register around and surveyed the new guest without interest.

"Is there a Mr. Service staying here?" inquired Groody as he embellished the register with his all but illegible signature.

"Yeah, he's here," replied the uninterested clerk, squinting at the scrawl on the register. "Grundy? Gooley? Moo ——"

"Groody. What suite does Mr. Service occupy? Before you assign me I want to see him."

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"Forty-three. Wanta call up 'fore yuh go up?"

"No, I'll just mosey. Boy, watch this suit-case for a minute or two till I get back."

The fifty-year old boy shuffled over to a corridor and shortly reappeared without the suit-case. Then he led Groody up the steps, down a musty hall, and pointed out room forty-three. Groody gave him a quarter and knocked.

"C-come in!" came a well-known voice.

Its owner erupted from a chair and pumped Groody's arm wordlessly. The flyer's saturnine countenance became subtly softer as he grinned down at the chunky young man before him.

"How've tricks been, Tom?" he queried, removing his cigar.

"N-not so bad. And you? Sit down."

"All right, but I got tired. Now, what the —— are you doing here, and for what good reason was I instructed to follow you here? Have you become a hardware salesman in your senility?"

"—— n-near it."

Service grinned, and behind the huge, tortoise-shell glasses a pair of large and round blue eyes peered affectionately at the lanky Groody. Service was short and heavily built, and above the powerful torso a short, thick neck and round face were in harmony with his general architecture. His brown hair was cut in a short, stiff pompadour. His face was somewhat tanned, but the casual impression gained from the ensemble was that of a stout, round-faced, guileless young man with a soft voice, a slight hesitancy in speech, and an aspect of general good-natured neutralness.

As a matter of fact he was the son of a millionaire who had been twice governor of a great State, and had elected to forego the emoluments of his home for the joy of wandering. That chunky body was the dwelling-place of unbelievable strength, most efficiently trained and poised. Before cutting loose from the parental pocketbook, Service had learned something of four different languages in addition to the education of a mining engineer, and by reason of visiting most of the countries of the world between the ages of twenty-five and thirty he had become a linguist of no mean ability.

Groody, after watching him and testing him over years of comradeship in odd corners of the earth, knew him as a wonderful rough-and-tumble fighter, a zestful soldier of fortune, who asked neither why nor how, but only where, and the possessor of the most remarkably keen and active mind he had ever known.

The silence had lasted for nearly a minute before Groody broke it. In that minute both men's minds had been like screens over which flashing pictures of the world had passed.

"Well, Thomas, place yourself!" commanded Groody.

"Sh! I'm a detective!" grinned Service. He was thirty-four in years, at least fifty in experience, and now, as his round blue eyes twinkled through his glasses he looked like a vapid twenty-five.

"Huh?"

Groody's cigar was poised in the air, and as he considered Tom's news one corner of his mouth drooped still further.

"What might you be detecting, and why?" he inquired, placing his cigar in his mouth and chewing on it the while his narrow eyes watched Service for any hint of mirth.

"Well, you know I was in the Army Intelligence during the war while you were c-cavorting in the c-clouds," said Service. "Got to be a major——"

"—— forgive you!" interpolated Groody.

"— and was lucky enough to put over a couple of pretty good deals—one in Spain and the other in this country—Detroit."

"You always were a lucky ——, I remember," nodded Groody. "With your baby stare and your little stutter you're set—they fall for you like a fly for a spider. Proceed."

"Well, after the war was over I was in Germany for over a year on the same stuff. Got in on all this on account of speaking French, Spanish, German and Italian, you know——"

"To say nothing of a common or cursing acquaintance with five or ten more. Proceed."

"I got back in Washington to chuck the whole thing up early in 1920. Then I got such a good chance with the secret service—promised some excitement up Frisco-way in connection with all this drug and liquor traffic—that I was persuaded to stay."

"Got inveigled, same as I did by getting assigned on border patrol."

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"Uh-huh. Well, that's all. Just been hanging around twiddling my thumbs, getting a little excitement, and making up my mind to quit and beat it as soon as something interesting broke. When your wire arrived in Frisco and happened to find me there I was all set to cut loose. Then this business I'm on came up, and the chief wanted me on it for two reasons—the job needed a little language, or might, on account of some foreigners being mixed up in it, and the man that'd been handling it got killed."

"Sounds interesting. What am I doing here? Hanging around watching you?"

"N-no," returned Service gently. "You get to be a detective, George."

"The —— I do!" stated Groody calmly and without surprize. "What do I want to hang around the godless wilds of West Virginia for? I'd rather be in Texas. I want to go places!"

"Sure. But why not pick up some cash, hang around a few weeks and then we'll both hit for the south, north, east or west. I'm not p-particular."

"Well, that's a thought, too. I'm not very heavy financially. But tell me, how and why do I become a sleuth, what do I sleuth and how, how much of a financial persuader is there in it, and——"

"I've got it all fixed. You're just the man we need. You're to be a special agent, and unless I'm wrong you'll find you won't be b-bored. I'm the guy that has to sit around and do the heavy l-looking on, mostly. Listen, and I'll tell you the whole deal."

"Before that, I want to get set here. Does that door lead anywhere? If it does and the room's empty, I'll speak for it and get my luggage up. I take it we're to be in this town a while?"

"I thought you'd accept the nomination," said Service calmly. "Yes, a week, anyway. Go ahead and get fixed."

Groody stalked out with the deliberate, long-legged stride Service knew so well.

"Same old Groody!" he was thinking.

The six years had changed him somewhat, but fundamentally the lanky adventurer was the same. His face had lines of bitterness in it that had not been there during the days they had roamed in care-free abandon, squeezing the juice out of life as the opportunity presented itself.

Service, having figured the proposition out, as he did most things, was not hard-pressed for an explanation. Restlessness, wanderlust, had grown into chronic discontent with Groody—as it had often done with Service himself. He wondered whether Groody realized, as he himself did, what the inevitable end would be? Realized, perhaps, and yet was powerless to help himself when the desire to leave all things behind had him in its grip?

The temporary agent of the secret service leaped to his feet with a lightness and strength that spoke for the steel springs of that heavy-looking body, and began pacing the floor with soundless steps. No sense of mooning along on *that* line. His thoughts flashed back to the last time he had seen Groody, which had been in Shanghai. Service had been on his way home, having just received a cable telling him that his mother was not expected to live. Groody had shipped as a stoker, and within an hour would be on the first lap of his trip to Brest.

"Got a notion to fly, if the frogs'll let me," he had said. "Like to get myself a few Germans, and at the present rate I'll be too old to walk before the U. S. takes a notion to get in. S'long, Tom. Let Lonny know when you move. If you've got nothing better to do, take a whirl at the Foreign Legion yourself."

That had not been his good fortune, Service reflected. His mother's lingering illness had kept him in the States until 1917, but reports drifted back to him at odd moments that over at Issouden Groody was proving himself so wonderful a pilot that they would not let him fight. They had kept him showing what he knew about handling a ship to eager flyers who had already been through a half-dozen assorted schools, only to find that a saturnine young man in a small Nieuport single-seater, with a cigar clamped in the corner of his mouth, could ride them into the ground with effortless ease. And he could show them more about handling a ship in the complicated maneuvers of combat than they had ever known. Later he had gone to the front, and to the seven Huns he had knocked down while with the French, had added five more.

It was good to be with Groody again. This job ought to be over soon, and then a worldful of interesting places awaited them.

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## III

GROODY was successful in his request for the room adjoining Tom's, and within a half-hour his trunk and suit-case reposed therein. The connecting door was unlocked, and Groody's lathe-like form appeared.

"Before being inveigled with the speciousness of your arguments, I'll wet down the face and hands," he stated. "I'm getting in practise for a detective by glancing keenly at everything and everybody. I gather from the works on the subject written by bright young men in New York City that the first qualification of detecting is to glance keenly at everything."

He shortly reappeared, minus coat, vest and collar, and proceeded to drape himself in a chair.

"Shoot!" he commanded.

Service lighted a pipe which was as short and chunky as himself, took off his glasses and polished them slowly, and stretched his short legs.

"Here's the proposition," he said, his words more crisp and precise than was customary with him. "During the last eight months there has been a series of robberies that have completely puzzled everybody from the Federal officials on down to the lowliest constable. It's only lately that they have been connected up—that is, been considered as possibly the work of the same gang.

"The first one was a jewel robbery in Badley, Texas. Badley is a town of around forty thousand. Two men walked into the principal jewelry store of the town—Shabinger's—at the noon hour when only two clerks were in the store. One went to the back of the store, got one clerk to show him some goods while the other man got the other clerk to show him some rings nearer the front. Then they both pulled guns, and they got both clerks in the rear of the store, held by one crook and his gun. The other thief calmly locked the door and pulled up the curtains. Within five minutes they had both clerks bound and gagged, and had fifteen thousand dollars' worth of the most valuable jewels.

"Within a half-hour after the crooks had left, another clerk returned from lunch, naturally got suspicious, and the police were at work within an hour. They had an excellent description of the crooks. One was a big man, described as about five feet ten, rather stout, iron-gray hair, hard face, and a small scar on his chin. The other man was shorter and rather slender.

"It was not many minutes before every town within a hundred miles had been notified. It happened that no trains had left Badley in the interim. Every train and road was watched. The crooks had simply disappeared into thin air. The jewelry taken was almost impossible to identify. They showed absolute familiarity with the stuff and where it was kept and what was most valuable. The town was gone over with a fine tooth comb. The crooks were simply not there.

"The next one was in Mercer, a little town in Arkansas. Two men walked in the back door of the little bank there after closing time while the day's accounts were being gone over, and so forth—you know the bank men work for hours after closing time. They must have known the back door was not locked. They got eighteen thousand dollars.

"There were three men and two women in the bank, and all were bound and gagged. One crook was described again as a big man—description tallied with the robber in the Badley case. Other man was shorter, rather chunky, with a bristly mustache and black hair, about forty years old. Both men whipped on masks as soon as they got in the door, so the identification is not so detailed, but the scar on the big man's chin—about half an inch long, at the right corner of the chin—is the same in both cases.

"The next one was the robbery of the home of a wealthy man in Seakirk, Missouri—pearl necklace belonging to the man's wife, and valued at forty thousand dollars. The man's name is Carson. He was away on a business trip, and on Sunday afternoon Mrs. Carson was in the house with the butler and two maids, both of whom, it seems, were in their rooms.

"Big man in it again—held up the butler when he opened the door, and with the aid of a confederate who is described as clean-shaven, thin-faced, gray-haired, and about five feet ten tall, bound and gagged the butler, went up-stairs to Mrs. Carson's room and forced her to open the safe and give them the necklace. They also took other jewelry worth eight thousand dollars—rings and things.

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"To make a long story short, the thing totals up three robberies of jewelry stores, two bank robberies of the same type as I described, the robbery of the Carson's home, and one pay-roll robbery, when the guards carrying the pay-roll of Seaman and Company, manufacturers, in Elkton, Tennessee, were held up in broad daylight. There were two of them, and one shot at the robbers. He thought he missed, but as a matter of fact the guns of both men were later found to be loaded with blanks. Rigid investigation has not shown a thing to prove the men were in on the robbery. It remains a mystery. Both men have been in the employ of the company for years, both are family men, and neither has shown any signs of sudden prosperity.

"In every case the man—big, tall, stout, with iron-gray hair and a scar on his chin has been identified more or less completely. In each robbery except those of the jewelry stores masks were used, but the general description fits.

"But the point is that in every case these thugs have made a clean getaway. In the first case in Badley, for instance, when it was only a matter of minutes before the police got into action, they never found hair nor hide of the men, nor any trace of them. Same with the other jobs. Another thing which balks us is that none of the jewels, so far as we can learn, have turned up. Of late months every known fence in the country—you know what a fence is, don't you?"

"Receives and disposes of stolen property," nodded Groody.

"Well, they've been watched and there isn't a trace. In every instance except that pearl necklace the robbers have taken stuff that was not conspicuous—no single item big enough to be noteworthy or easily identified. By changing settings, and other ways, most of the loot could be well disguised, but even so, if they were disposed of in the ordinary way, I believe we could have gotten some clue. Either these crooks are holding them, or else they have a brand new method of disposing of them. They only took currency from the banks, and of course the pay-roll robbery was cash.

"I'm just giving you a sketch of the thing because your job won't require any knowledge of the exact details."

"I still don't see where I come in, or this burg either," announced Groody. "Have there been any ungodly machinations of the underworld in Parkerton?"

"I'm coming to that. Now to sum up what you need to know: there's a big, stout man with iron-gray hair and a scar on the lower right-hand corner of his chin mixed up in every one of these things, we believe. In every one of them we know there is a big stout man—we can't swear to the scar in the cases where a mask was used, but it's reasonable to believe it's the same man. In the second place, they have always shown a complete familiarity with every job, despite the fact that they have never been seen or heard of in those sections of the country before. They always know what the valuable things to take are, the location of them, and how to go about getting them."

"Clever boys," nodded Groody. "Any further evidence that these diversified abominations are the work of the same outfit?"

Groody was sitting approximately on his neck, one long leg thrown over the arm of his chair and his narrow eyes so nearly closed that they were mere slits in his bronzed face. Service grinned at him with eyes that were soft behind the big glasses and then answered the question.

"I'm getting to that. Now, item three that you want to remember is that in one case—the pay-roll robbery—inside assistance seems indicated. As I said, though, careful and expert work has failed to uncover any evidence at all. Nevertheless, there must be some. I may say that one of the guards was well acquainted with Schrader, advance agent of a big carnival called the Levin-Willet Greater Shows. This advance agent has no criminal record, and so far there has been nothing criminal unearthed in his brief but intimate acquaintance with this guard. Schrader spends as much as a week or so in a town before the carnival gets there, arranging things—publicity, license, and so forth. He's been shadowed for two months, without result. The reason for shadowing him is that after the fifth robbery we found out that the Levin-Willet Greater Shows had either been in or near each town at the times the robberies were committed. This came about after months of work——"

"What kind of work?"

"I wasn't doing any of it, but I can tell you. This business, notwithstanding fiction, is simply a big organization going

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over every possible detail, step by step, and from a mass of information, eliminating some, connecting up other seemingly widely separated items, and constructing, mostly with painful slowness, a structure which means something. About the only thing that was turned over to me to work on is that this carnival, as I say, has either been in or near each one of the towns at the times that the jobs were pulled. In the case of the two bank robberies, they were forty miles away one time and twenty the other. One jewelry store robbery was pulled fifteen miles away from the carnival's stand. In the other cases, the show was in the same town."

"You figure that the usual gang of thugs that follow a carnival are responsible for these nefarious goings-on?"

"Not the usual gang of cheap crooks, no. Of course, it took the men on the case a long time to connect up the carnival with them at all. In the first place, the robberies were committed at long intervals, and not until after the fifth one did the thing begin to shape up as you can readily see. Then they went back over the cases, and found that in every case the carnival and all its attachés had been carefully gone over. There was not a sign of the crooks around the carnival lot in any case, nor any sign of the loot. Every employee and stranger had an alibi, and furthermore there was no identification. The crooks were not with the outfit. Each chief of police vouched for that.

"Nevertheless, it came down to the carnival being our best clue. I say 'our,' but of course at that time I wasn't working on the case. I'm telling you what was turned over to me by other men who have been or are working on it all through the country. The total loot taken from towns this carnival has traveled through is over $150,000. And no arrest yet and not much to work on.

"Well, finally, after several attempts at planting one of our men actually with the carnival, we succeeded. That was another thing that strengthened suspicion. This outfit simply would not hire a stranger even as canvasman or other cheap labor. There are a lot of foreigners with it. Finally we located an agent who had had carnival and circus experience, spoke Italian and several other central European languages, and he finally caught on with the outfit. His job was to bore through from the inside and find out what was underneath the surface, if anything. Four days after he started, he was shot. In the trial, through a dozen witnesses, it was proved to be a case of self-defense to the satisfaction of the court.

"According to the testimony, the man was sneaking around the railroad compartment cars where the carnival people mostly live even while they are in a town. According to the testimony of these people he was ordered to come out of his hiding-place between two cars, and instead of doing so he shot and started to run. They gave chase—a guard and several other carnival men, and he shot at them. They shot back and killed him.

"Now that may be the truth. He was not an experienced man, and in his quest for information may have been too zealous and didn't use his bean. Then again, he may have known too much and just got bumped. Anyway, he's gone and we don't know whether he found out anything or not.

"As I said, all efforts other than this to plant a man with the carnival have failed. Outside investigation has shown nothing except that this bunch is very successful in getting in right with town authorities, and that their gambling games and even off-color shows get by in great shape. Not only that, but their mob of grifters work fast and furious, because of that same stand-in with town authorities. Nothing has been done about that, by our orders. We don't want to scare our game by picking on 'em for small stuff. Get the idea?"

"I commence to get a gleam of light," nodded Groody.

"There are several other facets to the proposition. This gang sure cleans up. Before the week's out there are poker and crap games in which the carnival employees clean up the townspeople, we know there's a lot of bootlegging, and so forth. Where they get the stuff to bootleg seems to be sort of a mystery, too.

"Bear in mind that all this time the advance agent, Schrader, has never been caught in anything crooked, and yet if this carnival is a bunch of slick traveling crooks on a big scale Schrader must be an important individual. He apparently got wise to the shadowing some time ago and it was called off. I'm going to start on him again. Our efforts must be bent as much to laying

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for the next stunt they pull as trying to unravel the other ones, see?"

"I see. And furthermore, I seem to gather that your whole basis may be built of rotten timber."

"Of course. But I believe not."

"Well, still my palpitating heart by telling me what I do."

"You join the carnival!" Service told him gently.

Groody gave no sign of surprize.

"How do I succeed where your Sherlocks failed? Ever give that a thought?"

"I used up that thought the minute I was assigned here and recollected that you would be available. It's a cinch. Reason? This outfit carries an airplane and it's one of their best little money-makers, or so the boys told me when I inquired around after this bright idea dazzled me. Consequently, banking on your old-time willingness to crawl seven miles on your hands and knees for something entertaining, I got busy immediately. The bird who was doing the flying was arrested back in Meloburg, Ohio. Our men arranged to get him in a bootlegging deal and then nabbed him. That leaves the Levin-Willet shows without a pilot for their airplane, and thus without the juicy grapes brought in by said concession. The plane is owned by the show.

"A flyer isn't easy to pick up—that is, a proven one who has had enough recent experience plus ability to safeguard the carnival's somewhat heavy investment. Get me? By telling the right sort of story, and very probably by appearing to be not too particular how you pick up money, you ought to be greeted with open arms, and if you use your astuteness ought to worm your way in far enough to get us some real dope. That plane and its possibilities ought to help you, and in addition you ought to be sort of an aristocrat around the show. See the idea? Then, after you're a fixture and one of the show's brightest young assets, pass me the dope."

Groody chewed his cigar, gazed at the floor, and ruminated.

"You and the heathen Chinee are as one in being dark and devious. Well, for the sake of prying you loose from this criminal environment, I guess I'll bite. You say you've got everything fixed as to my official status? All right. I presume this carnival heads in here pretty quick or you wouldn't be here."

"Tomorrow. Then you're all set for it, eh?"

"Seems to me I've been set without much chance of getting out," stated the flyer.

"G-good. It'll be f-fun, George," Service assured him. The crispness and force which had crept into his voice during his resumé of the situation were gone, and he was again the gentle, hesitating young man.

"Now let's get everything fixed up – make sure you know all you need to, fix up who you are and why you're here, figure out how we're going to communicate with each other——"

"That last is important," remarked Groody. "I don't speak any languages but French, but a bullet is a bullet in any language. It'd be a shame for another man to get winged with his information still intact in his bosom."

For two hours they went over the scheme step by step, arranging details and examining the aspects of the problem with a great deal of care. Groody, familiar as he was with the flexibility and keenness of his comrade's intellect, wondered anew at the instant decision and penetrating mental agility which Service showed. The project was not an entirely new type of adventure for Groody himself to embark upon—in the past he and Service had come in contact with emergencies when safety depended on getting information from men who were their enemies, and the border patrol is likewise a fruitful source of experience in outwitting criminals.

At the end of the conference Groody was in possession of all the useful facts of the matter, and a definite plan of operation had been agreed upon.

"My *Nick Carter* imagination has been working overtime, and I have a dozen theories in my head that I'm not going to tell you," said Service at last. "It'll be a —— of a lot better for you to see what you can see and draw your conclusions from what you find out than it will for you to be going in there with a lot of ideas and trying to find out things that will fit into your pre-conceived notions."

"You're right there," granted the flyer.

His lips curved in that rather mirthless smile as he showed the fruits of Army life by dropping his cigar ashes on the carpet.

"The thought strikes me anew, Tom, that you yourself would make a criminal

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hard to catch if you ever started to frame anything."

Service's round face glowed as he grinned widely.

"It's —— to be so —— moral!" he sighed. "Since I've been in this business I've learned how dumb criminals are. That's the reason they're criminals, I suppose. If I was a fiction writer I'd write a gorgeous yarn about a secret agent with years of experience that decided to go crooked."

"I might be persuaded to read it. Must be supper time. Better not advertise our intimacy, had we?"

"At-a-boy!" crowed Service. "You'll be a detective yet. You're right. The gang of grifters with the carnival'll be drifting in tonight and tomorrow. Eat by yourself, and so will I. The guests of this hotel will provide good practise for your keen looks from now on."

"Well, I'll get on my duds and drift down. I'm feeling mysterious already, although I can't put my mind on it because I'm so hungry."

So saying, Groody made ready to assume his disguise and plunge into a good dinner.

## IV

THE carnival train, consisting of thirty cars, arrived the next morning, which was Sunday. Groody made sure that the long line of compartment, baggage and flat cars were on the siding at the fair grounds by taking a walk in that direction just before lunch. The grounds were the scene of ant-like activity. When he arrived tents were already going up along the midway, and the Ferris wheel, various rides, and other mechanical paraphernalia were being hauled off the cars and unloaded at various points along the line of stakes which marked the boundaries of the midway.

The rest of the morning he devoted to a casual survey of the town. It was very quiet, being Sunday, and there were few people on the streets. Most of the residential streets petered off into steep hills a few blocks from the center of town. Houses for three or four blocks in each direction were of fair size and appearance, but before long became smaller and more dingy.

There were several mines within two miles of Parkerton, and a great many of the houses seemed to be the abodes of miners. There were railroad shops, likewise, employing about three hundred men in addition to the railroad crew-men who made their home there. All in all Parkerton was the average town of from fifteen to twenty thousand people—sooty, grimy, barren, and yet with evidence that a determined effort at progress was being made. Several stores were large and up-to-date in the matter of window-dressing, and the apparent quality of goods on sale, judged from the windows, was excellent. Many of the usual Sunday loafers were well-dressed, while others, palpably laborers in clean, gaudily colored shirts and Sunday trousers, seemed to have mutually agreed that coats and collars were out of order.

At lunch the dining-room was nearly full. It was not hard to pick out the carnival attachés. The women were mostly tired-looking, sallow-faced; the men tanned, hard-looking, somewhat sloppily dressed. Service had explained that whenever a show was playing in a sizable town all those who could afford it scattered through the town to live as a welcome relief from the stuffy train which was usually the only home they had. There was a sprinkling of tables which held silent, loudly-dressed men whose faces did not invite confidence.

"By and large, not such a salubrious-looking gang," was Groody's mental comment.

He could see Service, at another table, sizing up the people with that vacuous stare of his. Later, in his room he gave a parting word to Groody before that gentleman started after his job.

"I believe that you can't go wrong, old man. Keep your eye peeled, and talk turkey all the while to the boss. If this outfit's anywhere near what we think it is, the boss is a man of discrimination and acumen."

"Not to say intellect and deviousness," added Groody.

He entered the fair-grounds a few minutes later with his usual bent-kneed, leisurely stride, and his customary attenuated cigar. He did not look like Parkerton, either in face or clothing.

The midway extended in a straight line directly ahead of the entrance to the grounds, which were surrounded by a high board fence. Groody stopped at the first

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group of men he passed. They were engaged in putting the finishing touches on a tent which was evidently to be the palace of the hot dog.

"Where might I find the boss of this outfit?" he inquired of a swarthy, pock-marked man who was temporarily resting.

The roustabout took in his questioner from head to feet in a lightning-like glance, and then jerked his thumb toward the last car of the train.

"Office—last car," he stated.

"Thanks. Have a cigar? What might this man's name be?"

It was one of the most hard-and-fast rules of the Levin-Willet Greater Shows that a stranger who seemed to be of any importance whatever was to be handled with gloves, particularly during the first few days of a stand. Groody, in appearance and manner, gave the impression that he was far from a nonentity. Consequently, he received a gruffly courteous answer.

"Name's Levin. This your town?"

The stocky, tough-looking workman nodded when Groody shook his head.

"Ps-s-st, Tony—the boss!"

Tony took a quick look at the approaching figure and then waved his arm.

"There he is."

Groody went to meet the man indicated. He was of medium size, and wore nose-glasses. He was dressed in a neat-looking suit of dark brown, and wore a Panama hat. His face, as the two approached each other and Groody got a good look at him, was long and thin, the cheeks holding large hollows. The mouth was wide and thin and from his nostrils deep-cut lines that seemed like furrows swept widely around the corners.

"Pardon me, but is this Mr. Levin?" inquired Groody.

"Yes sir. What can I do for you?"

"Give me a job!" stated Groody, one mouth corner drooping a trifle.

"Huh?"

The short bark of surprize was Levin's sole effort at speech for several seconds. He looked at Groody as though the flyer was some strange species of animal. Groody, looking down into the narrowed green eyes of the carnival man, knew that he was dealing with a far from mediocre character. He felt that behind those probing eyes there was a personality of unusual strength.

"Here's a boy that has seen everything," was his way of putting it.

"What did you ever do in this business?" asked Levin.

He took from his pocket a box of Turkish cigarets, groped for one, tapped it on the box, and put it in his mouth without once taking his eyes from Groody's face.

"Nothing. But I heard that you were carrying a ship with you and that the man that flew it 'll be in jail for some time. My name is Groody, and up to a week ago I was a flyer in the Army Air Service. If you want a man to run your ship for you, I'm your huckleberry."

"That's it, eh?"

Levin's voice was remarkably deep, and had the peculiar rough bass which comes from much talking in a loud voice. Evidently he was accustomed to shout orders loudly enough to be heard above the tumult of busy workmen.

He lighted his cigaret, and his eyes continued to bore into the easily slouching flyer's.

"Groody? Name's familiar to me somehow—been in the papers for any reason?"

"I had a little adventure down on the Mexican border a couple of months ago——"

"Got you. Why'd yuh get out o' the Army?"

"I'm not here to go through any catechism—I'm after a job."

Groody had sized up his man, and decided that decisiveness and independence were qualities which Levin would appreciate.

"However," he went on, squinting at the ash of his cigar through narrowed eyes. "There were a couple of matters came up that didn't get in the papers, and it seemed best to wait not on the order of my going. The Army was no place for me."

"Hum. How do I know who you are?"

"I can prove it on paper and in the air. I'm out for the jack—get me? And I'm not proud. If you want a flyer with two thousand hours in the air to run your ship as it should be run, and are willing to give me a fair split, I'm your man. Why I got out of the Army needn't worry you, as long as you know that the cops aren't going to step in and grab me off."

"Come over to the office," rasped Levin abruptly.

They made their way down the midway, Levin walking with short, quick strides and

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Groody with his usual deliberation. All around them there was seemingly inextricable disorder. Booths in all stages of construction, tents of varying dimensions being erected, a huge circular iron fence, apparently for an animal show, half-completed, women arranging candy and prizes on racks while men hammered and shouted.

It was new to Groody, and he enjoyed it. There were curious glances at him, but they were of short duration, for in the presence of the big boss industry was paramount. Groody noticed that there seemed to be various foremen and sub-foremen who roved from booth to tent to carousel, giving orders. Suddenly Levin's rasping voice broke into his thoughts.

"That suit didn't cost less'n a hundred bucks. You say you're an ex-officer. What the —— yuh want to go with a carnival for?"

"For the money. Looks are deceiving. I'm out to make a lot of dough in the shortest possible time. I can get it flying, and I can get more around a carnival, or I'm a liar. I've got friends in this business, and there's chances to pick up a little spare kale from time to time."

They picked their way through a gang of men who were erecting a circle of canvas evidently designed to screen some open-air performance, and Groody followed Levin toward the train. Levin waited for Groody to catch up with him.

"If you're hired, Mr. Groody, you'll live up to the rules and regulations of this show, understand?" snapped Levin.

Groody grinned. He was more and more certain that the less he backed water the more firmly he would be entrenched for his project.

"I'm no babe in arms, Mr. Levin. I'm a highly skilled professional whose services you may need. As long as I keep my mouth shut, keep out of trouble, do my work and mind my own business you should worry."

They climbed the steps of the coach on the end of the train, and Groody found himself in a compartment car. The passageway led down one side, and from it opened several compartments. Levin led him into the first door.

Two compartments had evidently been thrown into one. There were three small tables, one holding a folding typewriter, and three plain straight-backed chairs. A vertical file and a safe completed the furnishings. At one table sat a tall, thin man, partially bald. Bushy eyebrows, as blond as was his thin hair, shaded a pair of sleepy-looking dark eyes. His face, although not particularly full, gave an impression of flabbiness at variance with the leanness of his body. From his attitude at the table he seemed to be somewhat stooped. He was collarless, and wore no coat. He raised his eyes languidly and surveyed Groody seemingly without curiosity. His pallid face had no more lines than a boy's, and yet Groody could have sworn he was at least forty-five years old.

"Mr. Stanton, meet Mr. Groody. Now let's get to business," barked the vigorous Mr. Levin, removing his hat and taking one of the chairs. His hair was thin, iron gray, and parted in the middle. Seen in profile he had an undershot jaw and thin, jutting nose. He removed his nose glasses, and then reset them to his satisfaction.

"Mr. Groody wants to join as pilot on the ship," he told the quiet, tired-looking Stanton.

Stanton's lazy eyes, curiously without expression, rested on the tall flyer for a moment, and then found the fly-specked ceiling.

"Well?"

"Just got out of the Army Air Service," rasped Levin. " 'Member that attempted kidnaping thing on the border—fellow named Joy and his daughter? Groody says he's *the* Groody. Got any proofs?" he asked, turning to the pilot.

Groody, prepared for something of the kind, silently pulled the correspondence anent his resignation from his pocket, and handed the sheets to Levin. The carnival man looked them over quickly, and handed them to Stanton. Groody lounged easily against a table, smoked slowly, and watched the busy scene outside the window. The hum of industry, rising and falling, drifted through the open window.

"Says he got out of the Army for private reasons—avoid trouble. 'M I right?"

"Absolutely," returned Groody.

"What reasons?" inquired Stanton in a weary voice.

"My own," was the prompt retort. "The only thing that concerns you or this job is the knowledge that there won't be any police yanking me from your midst."

"How do we know?" snapped Levin.

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"Because I'm telling you, and using my right name."

"How do we know you can fly?"

"I can show you a pilot book with two thousand hours here and in France, and can show you in two seconds with a ship. Let's let that go—I want action. I know I've got the goods, so let me take a turn asking questions. First, can you use a pilot?"

"Maybe," said Levin,

"What do you mean maybe? Got some one else in view?"

"Fellow that's been mechanic wants to try it, but he hasn't had much experience——"

"Count him out!" said Groody, for all the world as if he was running the entire outfit. "That is, unless you want your investment and a —— of a lawsuit as risks every flight. No flyer knows anything under five hundred hours. Second, how much is there in it for the pilot?"

"Two and a half every ten minute ride with passenger. I supply everything for the ship—you pay your compartment rent and grub. Advertising flights you make free whenever I say so."

"I don't," said Groody promptly. "Whenever in my judgment the ship or the weather aren't right——"

"Course," barked Levin. "Then there's occasional extras——"

"Such as?"

"Oh, various things—neither here nor there now."

"Just what is your idea in joining a carnival?" inquired Stanton. Groody noted the excellent English and cultivated voice of the tired, stooped man, who seemed strangely out of his element.

"I got out of the Army—under a cloud, if you like. I want to make a lot of dough, and I want to make it quick, and I don't give a —— how I make it!"

"How much do you figure you can make with a carnival?"

"At the rate the boss here mentioned, I ought to clean twenty a day net on passenger flights, conservative estimate. Traveling with this outfit will give me some other openings, or I bummed around the world for some years for nothing. Gentlemen, assuming that I've got the flying goods and have cut my eye-teeth and am not entirely unfamiliar with some of the underground on carnivals, do you want to hire me? I may have too big an idea of what I can do, but I might turn out to be a valuable man. The possibilities of this air stuff have never been cashed on yet."

There was a moment's silence.

"Mind steppin' outside a minute?" said Levin.

"Sure."

Groody went out to the vestibule. He hoped he hadn't overplayed his hand. He had deliberately sought to give the impression of a bold, independent ne'er-do-well, none too scrupulous, and with eyes wide open for the main chance.

"Wish I could listen in on 'em," he was thinking. An idea struck him, and without wasting an instant he followed it. Walking noiselessly, he came near the open door.

"—get him sized up," Levin was saying.

"He might be just our man——"

"Pardon me, gentlemen," interrupted Groody, making his last two steps to the door serve as a warning. "One point in my favor I forgot to mention. Thought it might influence your decision. I'm credited with twelve planes in the war, and that ought to be worth a raft of publicity to you and cause a lot more people to take rides."

He went out again, the shadow of a smile on his hawk-like face.

"This job's sure making me a shrinking violet," he opined. "So they're going to size me up, and I might be just the man they want, eh? I wonder whether my flying is all they're after?"

Stanton, he noticed, had seemed to shrink a trifle in his chair when he had appeared so suddenly on the scene. If he and Levin had not been momentarily startled, he was badly mistaken.

It was five minutes before he was called back.

"We'll take you on, on trial," Levin told him. "No contract until after your first flight and we have a chance to look over your papers. If satisfactory, contract at twenty-five per cent. of what you take in on rides, subject to week's notice either side. Right?"

"Sounds so. When it comes time to sign I'll look it over more carefully. Where do I live, and where's the ship? How about a mechanic?"

"Got one. He'll be pretty sore about not gettin' the job himself. Stanton here'll take you around. Want to live on the train?"

"What do you mean—while we're in town?"

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Levin nodded.

"Yes. I'm not spending money—I'm making it."

"'Right. Get him fixed up, will you Bill?"

Levin put on his hat, and went out. In a moment he could be seen touring the grounds, stopping here and there to watch or advise the busy crews. The sound of hammering and sawing, bellowed orders, and creaking wagons formed a never ending, discordant hum.

Stanton raised himself from his seat with apparent difficulty, and grasped a heavy cane which was standing in a corner. Groody noticed that his left foot angled sharply from the leg, pointing inward. Stanton leaned heavily on the cane, and limped badly. The stoop became very noticeable when he was on his feet. He put on a disreputable felt hat.

"All right, Groody. We'll find you a place to live—give you Eller's bunk."

"He the man in jail?" asked Groody as they walked down the passageway.

"Yes."

The car was deserted. Every one was busy, evidently. In one littered compartment he glimpsed a sleeping baby. In others clothing was hung on lines, and in nearly all of them big, battered trunks took up most of the slight floorspace. The car was old, with peeling paint and stained and scratched walls. It was squalid beyond words.

Groody's mind was working busily as he and Stanton made their slow way through the second car. It was evident that his professional services were welcome in the Levin-Willet shows. His attitude of independence had seemingly lost him nothing—very probably gained something. He believed he had already started to establish himself as far from an ordinary employee.

His program now, as he saw it, was to ingratiate himself as far as possible with the carnival people, particularly the higher-ups. He and Service had both agreed that the possibilities in the case seemed to be only two: that the whole theory of the carnival being connected with that string of robberies was absolutely baseless, or that extremely shrewd and daring criminals were using the carnival as a base, so to speak, for their operations. It seemed an untenable theory that the ordinary gang of cheap pick-pockets, card-sharps, liquor and drug pedlers and other grafters could by any stretch of the imagination be responsible for a series of expert and lucrative robberies showing great professional skill.

Of course, it might be possible that expert criminals were traveling with the show as canvas-men, or something of the sort, but the chances, Groody believed, were that if anything at all was unearthed the big men of the outfit would be found concerned therein. And it was almost a certainty that the rank and file of the carnival were not connected with the robberies in any way. It would be fatal to have too many people knowing too much. Anything that might be learned from the great mass of attachés would be valuable only as furnishing isolated bits of information which, pieced together, might mean more to him than to the poeple who unwittingly gave him the information.

His job was to insinuate himself into the inner circle—and to accomplish that end without a trace of suspicion being attached to him. Operators such as he was set to catch would not turn a hair at killing a man who knew too much—witness the fate of the other agent.

In the third car Stanton, who had been stumping along quietly, turned into a compartment. Groody stood in the door for a moment and surveyed the littered cubby-hole. There were two bunks, one above the other, and a trunk and various articles of clothing indicated that it already had one occupant.

"Manson—he's your mechanic—is in here too," said Stanton.

"Well, I'm not," stated Groody. "I'll pay double, but I'm not bunking up with anybody for a while, unless I pick my own. Look at this! Think I want to live with a dirty——"

"It hasn't been cleaned up yet," admitted Stanton. "I——"

"Do I get a compartment by myself?" demanded Groody. "My baggage and so forth I don't want in a position to be tampered with, for one thing," he went on significantly. "And as I said, I don't hole in with any Tom, Dick or Harry on this show by a long row of beans!"

Stanton sat down, on the edge of the tousled bunk as if very weary. The lack-luster eyes, pronounced stoop and flabby, dissipated-looking face all contributed to

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the impression that he was very far from a healthy man. He lifted his crippled foot over the other knee.

"Of course, I understand your position," he said in his soft, husky voice. "There isn't any empty compartment——"

"Then I don't join the show!" bluffed Groody.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," remonstrated Stanton gently, as if bored with the whole matter. "Tell you what we could do. You intend to live on the train all the time?"

Groody bit off the end of a new cigar and nodded.

"Bert Sanders—he's got the animal show—always lives at a hotel. We can put him with you, and you won't be bothered with him except making jumps, and that's only one day a week. We'll put Manson and Kelly—he's in with Sanders—together. That's the best we can do."

"All right. Sanders pretty good fellow?"

"He's all right. You won't mind him."

Groody, after flipping away the match with which he had ignited his Havana, happened to look at Stanton's foot. The carnival man was gazing out the window. And that crippled foot, instead of angling inward, was now projecting almost straight forward in a normal position. Groody looked again, to make sure his eyes had not deceived him.

"Well, when do I move in?" he asked.

"Any time after three o'clock. I'll see that Manson is out of here by then."

"Where's the ship?"

"Dismantled, in a car."

"How about spare parts? Got any?"

"There's an extra motor and a pretty good bunch of spares, I guess," returned Stanton. "You can see to all that tomorrow. Everybody's busy now——"

"I presume the ship usually flies from place to place, when the distance is not too great. That's better for the ship and cheaper."

Stanton nodded.

"Mr. Levin said something about advertising-flights," remarked the flyer.

"The ship's painted with our name. It's been used to go over surrounding towns and drop handbills for advertising. By the way, you said you were an ace?"

Stanton's heavy-lidded, burned-out eyes rested on the flyer's face as he asked that question.

Groody nodded.

"It's on the official records."

"We'll get pictures and so forth to our advance man. Great publicity. You're a queer bird to want to join a carnival, Groody!"

Groody noted out of the corner of his eye that the man's foot was now at that abnormal angle.

"What I've done doesn't mean much in dollars and cents," he said. "I aim to make money out of this outfit, one way and another. You people'll find I'm not a bad *hombre* to have around in a pinch."

"I hope so."

The conversation veered to flying arrangements. Stanton seemed to have no idea of leaving, but rather was anxious to talk to the new employee. He admitted that the airplane had been one of the most lucrative features of the carnival. Whenever it was impossible to find grounds which would permit of being used for a flying field, it had been the custom to use another field and run busses from the carnival grounds to the landing field for prospective passengers.

"All the hicks want to look at an airplane, anyway," Stanton said. "It always does business."

Gradually Stanton turned the course of conversation until he was unobtrusively pumping Groody as to his past career. The flyer, alive to his opportunity, drew on his experience a great deal and his imagination somewhat to give the impression that he had not always been within the law. Stanton, it appeared, had been around a bit himself. Several times he put in a quiet question designed to test Groody's familiarity with particular places and events he was talking about, and always Groody returned a satisfactory answer.

Finally Stanton got to his feet with an effort.

"That foot is a funny proposition—never heard of a man in that condition being able to move it around—" he was thinking. Aloud he said—

"If it isn't too personal a question, Mr. Stanton, may I ask how your foot was hurt?"

"Got all smashed to —— in a railroad accident. I always will believe the doctors set it wrong—anyway, instead of sticking straight out it's always been twisted as you see."



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The man looked to be an invalid as he stood, leaning heavily on his cane and as stooped as a very old man.

"The muscles and all seemed to set just as they are so that the whole lower part of my leg is rigid," Stanton went on wearily.

"Can't move it, eh?" asked Groody sympathetically.

Stanton shook his big head. Groody noticed the loose jowls quiver with the motion.

"That's what put me in the carnival business," Stanton volunteered. "I used to be an actor before this came along."

"Tough luck," said Groody. "Well, I'll go up to the hotel, and come down with my stuff in about an hour. Right?"

"And don't forget your papers. Of course before we let you take our ship up we must be sure——"

Those opaque dark eyes swept across Groody's face swiftly, and then Stanton hobbled out.

Groody passed two slatternly women who were standing in the passageway talking, but he scarcely noticed them. He watched Stanton's walk closely as the man limped along.

"He was lying about not being able to move that foot, or else my eyesight is going bad on me," the flyer thought. "I can't see that it means anything, though. He may be one of these birds that like sympathy, and yet he doesn't appear to be that sort. Pretty wise egg, from the way he was pumping me back there. Well, he's one of the big bugs of the outfit, apparently, and as such every little thing about him is important, I presume. Used to be an actor —hum."

He went to his room in the hotel, and then passed on into Service's. Tom was taking a nap, but Groody awakened him unceremoniously and reported. Service did not seem surprized.

"I d-didn't figure you'd have much trouble," he opined, blinking owlishly as he put on his glasses. "Tell me how the outfit shapes up."

Groody told him, and then went on to the matter of Stanton. Service's round blue eyes grew brighter as he listened.

"Well, just for luck we might have a look at this bird's past career. Pump all of 'em as much as you can. What they say'll probably b-be lies, but might be the truth."

"Strikes me that this undertaking is going to require considerable time, Thomas my boy," remarked Groody.

"M-maybe. I told you my imagination had been at work, didn't I? Well, if by a miracle I'm anywhere near the mark, you may get a quicker chance to sit in than you think. You are occupying what is known as a strategic position, George."

"It may be strategic, and it's almost bound to be uncomfortable," returned Groody dryly. "When do you leave to get inculcated with Schrader's doings?"

"That's a wicked-sounding word you used. I'm l-eaving tomorrow. I'll gather my mail the rest of this week at General Delivery, Youngsville, West Virginia. You'll get yours from me at General Delivery here."

"Good. So long, then. I must get my luggage under way."

"B-by. I may be popping in any time. Write me all the dope."

## V

WITHIN an hour Groody was aiding the truckman to carry his wardrobe trunk into his future abode, which was no light job, in the narrow corridor. True to his promise, Stanton had caused all of Manson's possessions to be moved, and the compartment had been cleaned, as well as supplied with yellow, coarse, but clean bed-linen.

Groody was at home as soon as he had opened his trunk, no matter where he might be. He left it unlocked purposely, and intended to continue leaving his possessions in a manner that would present no difficulties to the curious. He made certain that one document was not too easy, and yet not too hard, to get at, and that each drawer of the trunk was in such condition that he could tell with certainty whether any alien hands had investigated.

This done, he carried a small gray book and some other papers with him to the office. He found the office occupied by a petite damsel with brown hair and eyes, very red lips, and an oval, olive-tinted face that was only slightly harder than a girl's face ought to be.

"I beg your pardon—I was looking for either Mr. Levin or Mr. Stanton?" said Groody, lounging against the door.

"One of them'll prob'ly be in before long,"

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she answered. "Anything I can do for you?"

"I don't believe so."

Her quick glance took in the quiet perfection of Groody's attire.

"You're the new flyer, ain't you?" she demanded.

"I am."

"I thought so."

Her large brown eyes dropped, and then she turned slightly and looked out the window.

"Here they come now," she remarked, gesturing toward the open window.

Groody could see the two men walking toward the car. The grounds, he noticed, were commencing to take on the appearance of readiness. There were two long lines of tents and booths, and here and there riding devices were assuming such shape that one could tell what they were. Gaudily painted signs were up over several tents, and pennants were commencing to fly from every available post and wire.

"Don't take long to get things in shape, does it?" he said.

"Not very. New to this business, ain't you?"

"Absolutely green, Miss——"

"Barrett. And your name's Groody."

She was really very pretty, Groody thought dispassionately. And she, like Stanton, did not seem quite the type he had expected to find. There were hard lines in her face, and in her eyes there was a sort of detached appraisal that was obvious, but that might only be because it was franker than the average. No girl passed up any bets in sizing up a strange man with whom she was bound to come in contact over a space of time, Groody thought.

"Well, you don't know what you're dippin' into, Mr. Groody," she said, sitting down before the typewriter. She smiled—a puzzling sort of smile—and then dropped her eyes as if in sudden shyness. She placed a sheet of carbon between two perfectly plain white sheets, and put them in the machine. When Levin and Stanton came in she was clicking away busily.

"Saw you coming," Groody greeted them. "Here's my references."

After Levin and Stanton had taken their seats the tiny office was so full that Groody continued to stand in the door. The two men looked over the pilot book, and some citations which gave Groody the right to wear three decorations from two governments, and proved that twelve planes had been his official toll of the enemy.

They appeared impressed. Groody, watching closely, caught an unspoken message that Levin flashed to Stanton, and saw that wreck of a man nod ever so slightly.

In a few moments the girl went out, after laying what she had written in front of Levin. As she passed Groody she glanced up at him, a curious look in her eyes.

"Seem to be all right," grunted Levin, tilting his Panama forward on his head.

"If you gentlemen have the time, I'd like to get a little dope. First, where do I eat? Second, what kind of a ship have you got, what spare parts, how old is it——"

"Cook tent right out there," interrupted Levin. "Board and compartment taken out of your week's time——"

"Perhaps Mr. Groody might rather eat with us in the car," suggested Stanton in his husky voice.

Levin's chilly green eyes flashed to Stanton's face.

"Well, I guess that'd be all right——"

"What's the difference?" demanded Groody.

"The executives eat on the privilege car," explained Stanton, as if it were an effort for him to talk. He passed a slim, well-kept hand over his bald head. "When we're making a jump most of the outfit eats there, but not at a stand. You might like it better."

"Thank you. I would. That's one thing I want to get right, Mr. Levin—my status with this carnival. I hope you won't think I'm trying to lay down the law or anything like that—I know you're running the show and I'm one of your employes. At the same time, I'm not hiring with you as a canvasman or some —— freak, and I don't intend to be classed with 'em. I'll do my work and take my orders from you gentlemen, but I expect to live like a human being and be treated as such."

Levin said nothing, but his eyes were boring into this remarkable applicant for a job as though trying to probe into his innermost thoughts.

"That will be all right," said Stanton soothingly.

"I'm glad of that. Now about the ship."

Levin, in terse phrases, told him it was a ship of the type used for training during the war, fitted with an extra large gas-tank.

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"Eller tended to technical end—look over parts yourself—see if you need anything extra. Get busy in the morning."

Groody nodded.

"You can buy those Jennys now, brand new ones, from the Government for two-hundred and fifty dollars, and fifty dollars for an extra motor," he remarked. "Repair depot at Montgomery. If I were you I'd invest in an extra plane or two—that is, if you continue to keep up the air end of your game——"

"Say that again!" commanded Levin.

Groody explained that the Government was selling ships that had been purchased for war use, and never even uncrated, for that ridiculously small sum, and just how to go about getting them. Levin took down the address of the Repair Depot and the name of the man to write to. He was evidently interested, and, Groody judged, pleased at the new flyer's alertness.

After a little more desultory conversation Groody, who had taken the stenographer's chair, arose.

"Well, I won't take up any more of your time—" he began, but Levin interrupted him.

"Si'down. Good a time as any to talk business. How does this contract suit you?"

The contract suited Groody—twenty-five per cent. of the gross takings, and such advertising trips as were deemed necessary. The show stood all expense, including pay of one mechanic.

"Any trips aside from advertising'll be arranged separately. Sometimes I make quick trips myself to next stand or something like that. Good publicity. Fix everything up tomorrow."

Under Stanton's questioning and guidance Groody was drawn on to talk more of his career before entering the Army. He was careful not to say so much that he could be thought a loose talker, but managed to work in a yarn or two which had to do with matters not precisely legal and his part therein. They were imaginary, but he hoped they would have the proper effect on his hearers.

He was using every faculty he possessed in the effort to analyze the two men before him, and he was certain that they, in turn, were continually striving to appraise him. That apparently casual conversation, using the valuable time of two executives, was not without a purpose. If it was so important to them to know just what sort of a man they had working for them, and what his qualifications and ideas and possibilities were aside from flying, there must be a reason, or several reasons.

So Groody acted his part, and wondered.

## VI

HE AWOKE from a sound nap in his compartment to find a small, dark-haired, dark-mustached little man looking down at him.

"My name's Sanders," said the man with a flash of white teeth. "I'm planning on moving a box o' stuff in here if yuh don't mind. I'm livin' uptown but I want to put some stuff in here——"

"Sure. I'm Groody, as I suppose you know."

The animal trainer was as lithe as a cat, and his grip was as strong as his hand was small and woman-like. He dragged in two wooden boxes with hinged covers and locks on them, and succeeded in jamming them under the lower bunk.

Groody equipped himself with a towel and some soap and made his way to the washroom. It was early evening. From outside that babble of noise still went on uninterruptedly, but he noted that several of the compartments were occupied. There was the wail of a baby, a woman's voice shrilling to a crescendo, the noise of something falling. Over the whole car there was the combined stench of food, none-too-clean clothing, and the close, dusty odor that never seems to leave a railroad coach.

When he returned Sanders had gone. Groody carefully pulled out two of the drawers of his trunk, but they had not been disturbed. He got out a mirror, put on collar, tie, coat and vest, and treated his thick brown hair to a quick combing. His toilet completed, he started for the privilege car.

He was to learn much, later, of the privilege car and what went on there. As he walked down alongside the train in search of it he wondered why it had been given the name.

The carnival grounds were shrouded in darkness, studded with electric lights. In the dim glow cast by these lights the carnival looked to be ready for business, although every man seemed to be busily at work. The Ferris wheel loomed dimly

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through the gloom, the carousel was indicated by a circle of lights, and many lanterns bobbed along between tents and shacks. Apparently as little work as possible was to be left for the morrow.

When he reached the privilege car, which could be plainly identified through the windows, he climbed up the steps and entered, curious. He saw what had evidently once been a dining-car. Starting from the kitchen at the upper end a counter ran down the center of the car for a little more than half its length. Before this counter a considerable group of men were standing, drinking a colorless liquid from small glasses.

"Moonshine," thought Groody. "There's one reason for the car's name."

The other half of the car seemed to be designed for a shabby club room. There were straight-backed chairs, and no carpet. Several folding tables were stacked in one corner. Inasmuch as there were no stools in front of the counter, Groody surmised that the executives of the show were served their meals at these tables, and that he was very late.

Sudden silence fell as he lounged up to the counter and caught the eye of the squat, bullet-headed man behind it.

"Am I too late to get anything to eat?" he inquired.

The man wiped huge, hairy hands on his apron and surveyed Groody through pig-like little eyes.

"Who might you be?" he inquired.

"I might be Julius Cæsar, but my name's Groody and I joined today. I'm taking all my meals on the car."

Groody had made this flip answer for a reason. The counter man had been somewhat truculent, and Groody had decided that the more successful he was in creating a distinct distance between himself and the low-grade employees the closer he would ally himself with the big men, which he conceived to be his most hopeful line of attack. It would not be an easy matter at that to become friendly enough to extract information from the rank and file of the show and still maintain his assumed position as one of the "upper ten."

"Guess we can fix you up with some ham and eggs," granted the counter man grudgingly. "Pete!"

A negro in a dirty apron and still dirtier cap appeared at the door of the tiny kitchen.

"Fix up some ham and eggs and coffee and bring 'em on!"

"Yassuh!"

A sudden burst of laughter from the group of men at the lower end of the bar caused Groody to turn toward them. They were a tough-looking lot, all but two of them coatless and several in soiled undershirts. Their hands and faces were smeared with dirt. Most of them were evidently common laborers.

"—have to be salutin' around here from now on!" came a husky voice with a touch of brogue.

Evidently the liquor was having its effect, for the laugh was out of proportion to the humor of the remark. Several of the men looked furtively at the tall flyer, as if frightened at their own temerity.

"Yessir, eats ham and eggs and everything!" went on the speaker, and another laugh was his reward.

The man was standing nearest Groody, facing his companions. He was a burly, brick-haired fellow, his big bare arms covered with a mat of reddish hair. He tossed off a drink of straight moonshine, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

There was silence for a moment, and then he erupted again.

"The boss ought've known better," he proceeded. "Give me another shot, Bill. Yessir, oughta known better than tuh expect a full-blown shavetail t' be sleepin' in the same car with a mechanic, tuh say nothin' o' the same shack. Why, it's a honor tuh the show just tuh have 'im around!"

Uneasy chuckles came from the listeners.

The counterman served the loquacious drinker with his order.

"Better pull in yer neck, Tommy," he advised in a low tone.

Groody was wondering just what his best play would be.

"Give me a drink, please," he said, his mouth drooping on one corner.

"Bring out the champagne, Bill. Don't yuh know who yuh're talkin' to? Aces don't drink nothin' but——"

"What?" inquired Groody easily.

The man turned with ostentatious slowness, holding his full glass in his hand. His face was big and full, and he had a scraggly red-brown mustache. His fleshy countenance was red as fire, whether

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naturally or as the result of liquor the cool Groody could not determine.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Irishman with mock humility.

The flyer had not decided whether the man's attitude was really inimical or not.

"For what?" he asked.

Every eye was on him now. From the kitchen came the sizzle of something frying —otherwise only the hum of the workers outside broke the silence.

With a sudden movement the carnival man spilled some of the liquor on Groody's coat.

The man turned around.

"Slim, what'd yuh bump me for?" he asked mockingly.

The man called Slim was standing at least two feet from the trouble-maker. He grinned uneasily, and his furtive eyes shifted to the ceiling.

"Why—why——"

Groody had made his decision. A long arm reached over and grasped the big Irishman's shoulder. He spun around in that grip as though on ball-bearings, and barely retained his balance.

"Now, excuse me!" said Groody, his eyes boring into his tormentor's.

Then the newest employee of the carnival reached down, grasped the man's arm, and deftly spilled the remainder of the liquor on the Irishman's flannel shirt.

The glass came down on the counter with a smash. The blue eyes flamed murderously. With a bound Bill, the barkeeper, vaulted over the counter. He grasped the irate drinker.

"Outside!" he commanded.

"I'll come with you," stated Groody with finality. "Keep my ham and eggs hot, please."

Bill was at a loss. The rest of the group were divided, apparently, between fear and the desire to witness a fight. Groody, as cool and calculating as ever, saw, and congratulated himself.

"I'm the object of more or less respect around this show already!" he was thinking. "The boss must have been around."

A stream of threats came from his prospective opponent as they went out the door, Groody in the rear. The Irishman was explaining in detail how he was going to take that blankety-blank shavetail to pieces and then put him back together again with so many parts missing that he would be unable to navigate successfully for some time.

The car-lights shone dimly over a wide roadway between the tracks on which the carnival train was standing and another switch. The train separated the carnival grounds and the prospective site of the battle, so there was little likelihood of interruption. The knot of men spread out along the side of the car, their attitude somewhat uncertain.

"Take off yer coat, lieutenant!" sneered the Irishman.

"You've been drinking—want to postpone it?" inquired Groody.

"Postpone, ——! I can lick a mon that spills my own likker on me with all the 'shine in West Virginia on me!"

Groody stalked out into the roadway. He had no hat on, and he did not offer to remove his coat. He had sized up the powerful carnival man—the fat around his middle and the somewhat bloated face. Groody had acquired, in divers places and emergencies, a remarkably efficient knowledge of battling.

"Come ahead!" he invited, standing there easily.

His opponent approached slowly. When he came close to Groody the big flyer bounded in. His hands moved wraith-like in the dusk. One sank home in the Irishman's stomach, and drew a strangled gasp.

Groody gave him no peace. The blows came so fast that the big fellow had no opportunity to do anything but guard, and that not too successfully. Groody had the advantage in height and reach, and he used it to the utmost. He was in and out like a flash, and always those workman-like blows sank home to the body.

He was using the first principle of fighting, when one's opponent is not a professional in the best of condition. Blows to the body are what hurt the ordinary man, and his condition is rarely good enough to withstand them.

His antagonist, however, was surprizing him. He was giving ground, and so far had only lashed out with his big fists twice, neither time reaching his mark. Groody's arms, working like pistons, were keeping him too busy. He was puffing noisily, and had settled to a crouch, the better to guard himself.

Groody bent from the waist to avoid a wild swing, and then leaped in with a

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feint to the head and a terrible right to the midriff, carrying all his weight with it. Two of the onlookers caught their champion as he fell backwards toward the car. Groody dropped his hands and stood waiting.

For a few seconds the Irishman seemed to be groggy on his feet. Then, with catlike quickness that seemed incongruous in so big a man, he leaped forward.

Groody was compelled to give ground in his surprize. Ducking and side-stepping with effortless ease, and using his close-held arms and hands to guard, he weathered the storm with not a blow having landed except on arms and shoulders. His adversary was boring in to close quarters, and Groody had no relish for that embrace.

Suddenly the man loosed a terrible would-be hay-maker that started from his knee. Following it was a left jab. Groody side-stepped, and the man's momentum was so great that he overbalanced and fell in the slippery footing.

He bounded to his feet. Just as he straightened the flyer let him have it. One—two to jaw and stomach, and followed that with a bounding attack in which the blows came so fast, and he slipped in and out so quickly, that he seemed to be floating on air. He might as well have been made of air for all the success the other man had in reaching him.

The big fellow was weakening—that last attack had him really gasping for breath. Sweat was running down his face in streams.

Groody bent from the waist under a wide right swing. As he went under it his left foot went forward and his right fist came around with all the momentum of his forward movement plus every ounce of strength in those long, whip-like muscles which made his lanky form so deceiving. It seemed that the fat closed over his fist as the blow went home.

Slipping out to the Irishman's right, he saw the man swaying on his feet. Groody measured him, and sent him to the ground with a right which reached the button.

He dusted his hands—he was acting, now for the onlookers' benefit—and lifted the bleeding, dazed victim to his feet.

"I guess that'll be enough, won't it?" he inquired.

The man slumped toward Groody, too weak to stand.

"Get him, some of you fellows!" commanded Groody.

He noticed the faces of Bill and the negro chef peering out the window.

"Now let me tell you something," said Groody as his recent antagonist sat on the ground and wiped his bleeding nose. "A —— good idea around this show will be to let me mind my own business. I crave no comments or interference at all. Get me?"

There was dead silence.

"I guess you do. You'll find me just as easy or just as hard to get along with as you want."

He walked over to the bleeding gladiator.

"Shake and call quits, eh?" he said.

The man hesitated a moment, as if puzzled. Then he growled something indistinguishable and grasped the outstretched hand momentarily.

"Well, me for the ham and eggs. By the way, my name's Groody."

The Irishman got to his feet slowly, spat, and his battered lips twisted in what might have been either a snarl or a smile.

"Mine's Manson, sir," he said. That "sir" had come with reluctance.

"Oho, my mechanic, eh? Be on hand at the car at seven o'clock in the morning, Manson. There's a lot of work to be done."

As he climbed on the car those sardonic lines in his face were deep-cut.

"What a good start *that* was!" he said cryptically. "Have I got the makings of a friend, or an enemy?"

Then he saw Stanton. The cripple was just turning in the door of the car.

"What happened?" he asked uninterestedly.

"Fellow got fresh, and I had to educate him. Might as well learn the boys to leave me alone and mind their own business," stated Groody.

"You're a good educator."

"Wasn't hard in this case. He's my mechanic. What sort of an egg is he?"

"You'll find him all right, I guess," Stanton said absently.

"How about my ham and eggs, Pete?" asked Groody.

"Yassuh. Right at that table, suh!"

A table had been put up in the corner, with wooden-handled eating implements already set out. Groody dropped into a chair and mopped his brow with his handkerchief.

"Just eating, eh?" asked Stanton.

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Groody nodded.

Slowly the stooped figure limped out the door, as Pete brought steaming, greasy ham and eggs, some thick chunks of bread, and a diminutive dab of butter. He followed the choice collation with some coffee served in a cup that was heavy enough to kill a man without being cracked.

Neither Manson nor any of the spectators returned to the car. Probably had to work, Groody thought. He wondered what Stanton thought of the incident. Those lack-luster eyes never gave a hint of what their owner might be thinking behind that dome-like forehead of his. Groody himself was not certain as to the wisdom of his action, but on the whole decided it had been all for the best.

"This swashbuckling attitude may get me in trouble," he mused as his clamoring stomach thankfully received the heavy food, "but I'll have to stick to it."

He could think of no more effective pose. He could not be too close-mouthed and be accepted from the first as one who could be trusted with illegal secrets, nor could he appear a weakling. All in all, a two-fisted, experienced man who could take care of himself and not be too scrupulous, not mix too much with the rank and file and attend strictly to business ought to assume a place somewhere near the top of the heap. Once there, it should be a simple matter to get a line on just what sort of an outfit the Levin-Willet Greater Shows might be.

One by one tired, dirty men dropped in, usually taking a drink and going out. One or two stayed, for a few moments, and to them Bill evidently recounted the story of the fight, for there were an unusual number of furtive glances in Groody's direction.

He finally went out, and walked down the side of the train toward his car. He felt the need of soap and water.

As he entered he met the pretty stenographer of the afternoon.

"Good evening," Groody greeted her, stepping back to allow her to get out.

"Evening," she returned with a smile. "How do you think you're going to like us, Mr. Groody?"

"Time's passed fast so far," he returned.

He smiled slightly as his eyes met hers. It was not a flirtatious smile; in fact, hardly a smile at all. It was rather an increase in the downward crook at one corner of his mouth, and it was caused by the girl's obvious desire to linger there, and the searching look which she had given him as his eyes met hers.

"If it's not too personal a question, what do you do with the show?" he asked lightly.

"Stenographer mostly—once in a while I take a wheel or something when somebody's sick."

She might not be a bad person to be on friendly terms with, Groody decided. She glanced at his bronzed face, and then looked down.

"I—I was lookin' at those citations," she said in a low tone.

"I'm not proud of the fact that I'm partially trading on them for this job——"

"Oh, Mr. Groody, why is a man like you getting into this filthy, crooked——"

Her suddenly passionate words broke off in what seemed like a half-sob. She brushed past him and half-ran into the next car.

She turned at the door, her face in the shadow so that he could not catch her expression.

"I heard about your fight with Manson. Look out for the slob!" she said rapidly, and disappeared within the car.

"Her language isn't so refined, so to speak, but she seems to have the habit of saying a mouthful," grinned Groody to himself as he went down the car.

He met two women and a man in the aisle, and the staterooms seemed to hold a larger proportion of their lessees than had been the case earlier in the evening.

All conversation, apparently, was public property, for loud tones were the rule, whether the language employed was choice or not. The car evidently held a considerable number of married—or supposedly married—people, for there were women in several staterooms. Every door was open, and the virtue of modesty did not assume such proportions that it might be termed prudery.

A thin-chested, scrawny man with a head two sizes too large for his body and a mop of bushy hair stuck his head out the door of the compartment adjoining Groody's.

"You the new flyer?" he inquired in a deep bass rumble.

"Right you are," returned Groody.

"Hear you knocked the tar out o' Manson. Glad of it, the big Irish ——!"

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This opinion, given in a loud voice, somewhat shocked the none too vulnerable Groody, in the circumstances.

"Oh, no—we just had a little argument and there's no grudge held," he answered, and went in his compartment. He wondered who the man was. Later he found out that he was lecturer for the freak museum.

As a matter of form he pulled out the drawer of his trunk which held the few letters and miscellaneous correspondence he had with him. Then his indifference disappeared. The long, narrow eyes grew still more narrow, and his mouth curved in a smile which held real pleasure. He shut the door, and went back to the trunk.

Without a doubt the papers had been disturbed. He had carefully arranged them so that the slightest tampering with them would be obvious. He took them out and ran through them rapidly.

One of them was gone.

"Talk about fast workers!" breathed the delighted Groody. "And Stanton knew I was up ahead eating!"

His mind leaped ahead. The loss of that paper meant much, for if anything in the world could help him to the position he desired to occupy in the scheme of things around the carnival, that theft was it.

He and Service, carefully figuring every possible angle in a dangerous project, had prepared that letter as a shot in the dark. Written on Tom's folding typewriter on a plain sheet of paper, it read as follows:

August 1, 1921, San Antonio, Texas.

DEAR GEORGE:

Just a line to tell you not to worry. There hasn't a soul suspected that that big shipment of drugs got to San Antonio in your airplane. Although I wouldn't trust Thayer as far as I could throw the city hall, he won't blab unless he gets caught, and I don't see how he can. He's holding it in that garret of his over the garage on 1st and Preston until everything dies down and then he'll get rid of it O. K. You're safe and so am I, I think—not a whisper. We been getting away with murder, though, haven't we kid? Glad you got out of the Army so quick and easy. Will send this registered. Let me know where you are all the time so I can get you the rest of your share after the stuff's sold. My address is Baily Hotel now.

Hastily, JOE.

"If they want to use you—and I'm —— if I don't believe there's an airplane in this pie somewhere—they'll want to make sure of their man before they let him in on anything," Service had said. "The idea of going through your stuff may occur to 'em. A letter like this will make 'em think that not only are you a crook, but that they've got something to wave over your head and *make* you fall in with 'em. Get the idea?"

Groody had, distinctly. It had been his casual surmise, which it proved had been in Service's mind too, that an airplane would be a useful thing for a crook's getaway. The planting of that letter had been a long chance, and apparently the chance shot had found its mark.

The tall flyer, his eyes like two lines of light in his face, set out for a walk; and in him there was a feeling of utter content which had been a stranger for weary months.

Groody craved action, and prospects were good.

## VI

AT SIX-THIRTY A.M. he absorbed a considerable quantity of nutriment in the privilege car, and thence made his way to the car where the ship was housed. It was several minutes before Manson arrived, his eyes heavy with sleep. During the interval Groody made a quick inspection. Both fuselage and motor were outwardly, at least, in good condition. He thumped the wings, which had been removed from the fuselage and were upended on their leading edges and held by sturdy thwarts in the approved manner for shipping. His ear could detect no loose wires in them. At the end of the car a small set of bins held various spare parts—several sets of control and landing and flying wires, some spare struts and tail-skids, as well as an extra set of controls, consisting of rudder, elevators and ailerons.

Manson came in the car slowly. He was evidently feeling somewhat morose as a result of consuming too much bad liquor.

"Morning, Manson. You're a little late aren't you?" Groody greeted him.

The flyer was dressed in olive drab shirt and breeches, with a disreputable pair of field boots to finish off with. Manson himself wore overalls below and a dirty undershirt above. He glanced upward at Groody.

"I'm sorry, sir. Drank a bit too much, I guess, but the team ain't here to drag 'er over, anyways."

His attitude was neither sullen nor

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belligerent. He and his chief looked over the stock of parts, and Groody found that the motor spares were mostly conspicuous by their absence. There was a spare carbureter and magneto, a couple of pistons, and other larger units of the motor, but a very unsatisfactory number of spark-plugs, needle valves, floats and other small items which are most frequently needed.

"Let the spares get down pretty low, didn't you Manson?" queried Groody.

"Ellers saw to all that mostly," Manson said apologetically. "Here's the team now."

Within an hour ship and wings and propeller were deposited on the inside of the track. The terrane was smooth enough, but none too large for the take-off. However, it would serve, Groody thought. He and Manson succeeded in getting wooden horses, stepladder, and other things necessary to setting up the ship and rigging it, and at ten o'clock started to work.

It did not take Groody long to realize that Manson, although he overcame his tendency to loaf under Groody's sharp tongue, knew but little about the mysteries of an airplane. Time and time again he found that Manson was at a loss as to which bolt to use, and his efforts to appear efficient were almost pitiful.

In the middle of the afternoon, just as the first trickle of patrons had started in the gate of the grounds, Groody lost patience. He had been watching Manson try to true up the inner bay of one wing, and could see plainly that stagger, dihedral, and other matters were subjects of which Manson had no knowledge.

"Manson, what the —— are you trying to do?" Groody demanded from his lofty seat on a stepladder, where he was endeavoring to get a cabane strut where it ought to go. "Come clean now—how much d'you really know about rigging a ship? You could write it all on a dime and still have room for 'In God We Trust,' couldn't you?"

Manson looked up quickly, but without particular hostility. His fleshy, unshaven face was not appealing, but he looked like neither a sneak nor a bad-actor, when one took his eyes into account.

"I—I'm more of a motor man," he said hesitantly.

"Well, we'll see if you are. What are the parts of the carbureter on this motor, what's the principle it works on, and where would you look for trouble if, say, the motor started to miss because it wasn't getting enough gas?"

Manson tried to answer, but could not. In a general way, he knew a bit about carburetion, but in details and trouble-shooting his knowledge was nil.

"Well, I'll tell you, Manson," said Groody, seizing the respite to draw one of his inevitable cigars from his pocket. "I'm a pilot, and no mechanical wizard, see? I don't pretend to know enough to keep a ship and motor running continuously without expert assistance. And as near as I can see, you don't know as much as I do. You said a while back you were in the Air Service during the war. Mechanic?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, after a barely perceptible interval.

"I doubt it. Sure?"

Manson's eyes were on the ground. He thumped his thigh with a wrench several times, and then looked up with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, as a matter o' fact I was a supply sergeant."

"That's more like it. Well, Manson, after last night I hate to do it, but it isn't any grudge. It's because I've got to have a real mechanic. You're fired from this job as soon as I can land another mechanic. I'll try to see to it that you get just as good a job around the show somewhere——"

"The —— you will!" snarled Manson in ungovernable rage.

The man's face was flushed, and his eyes pin-points of menace. The change was startling.

"You heard what I said!" Groody told him evenly, eying the man curiously.

"You ain't gonna fire me—get that!" said Manson truculently, his first flare of wrath now settled to mere belligerence. "We'll see the boss about that!"

"This is as good a time as any for a showdown," and Groody uncoiled his long legs and clambered down the ladder.

The ship looked about ready to fly, which was deceptive. The wings had been attached and the wires partly taken up, but the monotonous, accurate work of rigging was still to be done. Groody decided that the few tools would be safe until they returned, so he said briefly—

"Let's go!"

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Manson tramped along silently, head down. Groody, somewhat puzzled at the man's passionate resentment at the idea of being transferred to another job, would have been enlightened had he known what was going on in his subordinate's mind.

For there is an aristocracy in a carnival, a circus, or any other line of endeavor. It was not closely drawn and was very flexible in the Levin-Willet Shows, as in any other carnival. Nevertheless, from canvasmen to concession owners, from freaks to spielers, each had a place commanding greater or less prestige. And Manson, as mechanic and substitute flyer, directly in the employ of the owners, had a position which appealed considerably to Miss Effie Bellair, of the chorus of the "Hula Girls" show. Ever since he had been in possession of his job and been the owner of a considerable bankroll, he had found that being an airman and in possession of money at the same time made him temporarily high man with the plump, peroxid blonde, whose opulent charms suited his fancy to a T. The thought of losing his high position was enough to fill him with fiery resentment.

Thus it came about that when Groody, cold and saturnine as usual, and his companion went in search of Levin, Manson grew constantly more determined to show this new man where he got off.

They found both Levin and Stanton in the small tent which was now executive headquarters of the carnival. It was set behind the row on the midway. Perhaps a hundred people, largely children and their mothers, were wandering around the concessions. The barkers for the various attractions labored only spasmodically, and the men and women who ran the various wheels-of-chance booths and other prize-winning concessions were getting no play whatever. The tinny music of the merry-go-round struggled abortively against the torpor that overhung the grounds.

Manson got into action immediately.

"This guy wants t' fire me," he said wrathfully as soon as they had entered the tent.

"Huh! 'Smatter?" asked Levin.

"Oh, he wants tuh——"

"Give Mr. Groody a chance to put up his side first," Stanton interrupted softly.

"I've got nothing whatever against Manson here, except that by his work and by his own admission he's shown he's no mechanic," stated Groody. "I don't pretend to be enough of a rigger and motor mechanic to handle the job. I've got to have a real mechanic!"

"How d'yuh know what I can do?" demanded Manson loudly.

"I know enough. I won't argue the question, gentlemen. Manson is no mechanic, and I won't fly unless I have a good man—not for long, anyway."

Levin stole a glance at Stanton. Apparently the decisive owner was at a loss. For the first time Groody saw him hesitate. In some subtle way the impression that Stanton was the real power had been growing in Groody's mind ever since the day before. Little things—things that apparently meant little, such as what was happening now, were responsible for the thought. The quiet, dissipated-looking cripple was quiet and bored as ever, and yet he seemed to be taking the situation into his hands.

"Where could you get another mechanic, Mr. Groody?" he asked, tapping on the table before him with a long, very white finger.

"There ain't gonna be no other——"

"Shut up!" snapped Levin, and Manson subsided, but not, Groody noticed, as if cowed. In the background the stenographer had stopped typewriting and was listening with her eyes fastened on the flyer's noncommittal countenance.

"Any sizeable town—Parkerton, for instance—has got men in it who were mechanics in the Air Service during the war," stated Groody. "In a week or two, by advertising, we can pick up one who'll be crazy to go with a carnival. I'll keep Manson till then——"

"I tell yuh there ain't gonna be no 'then!' " stormed Manson, his face flaming.

"We'll fix you up all right, Manson," Stanton soothed him.

Then a remarkable thing happened, to Groody's mind. The burly Irishman leaned a hairy elbow on Levin's table, and thrust his countenance close to the owner's.

"I said there ain't gonna be no other mechanic, see?" he gritted. "I ain't sayin' nothin' about not gettin' the flyin' job when it was promised to me, but I'm gonna stay right where I am!"

What Groody expected was that the forceful carnival man would treat them all to a demonstration of how to take care of an

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impertinent underling. Instead, Levin glanced again, as if for help, to Stanton. The cripple's eyes were lack-luster, his face seemed the same, and yet there seemed to be a deadly menace in his steady gaze at Manson.

"We'll talk it over later," he said evenly. "There may be——"

"We'll talk it right now!" raved Manson. "I ain't gonna quit, see? And you ain't gonna fire me either, see? I ain't no mechanic, eh? Well, I'm a —— good talker, and if I start to talk——"

"You'll probably talk too much, as you are now," Stanton cut in.

With a motion as quick as his movements were usually languid he had leaned forward and ground out those slow words with his eyes probing into Manson's. The equable tones cut off the Irishman's threatening words so quickly that Groody could but stand and wonder.

"I'll have a talk with each of you separately," Stanton went on, leaning back in his chair.

It was as if he had assumed a pose again. For a moment he had been a snake ready to strike. Now he was a tired, stooped, bald-headed old man.

"All right," said Groody. "But there's no use of talking much to me. What I said goes as it lays. Come on, Manson. There's a lot of daylight left."

As he turned and went out he caught an unreadable look in Ann Barrett's eyes, but he had no time for her. That scene with Stanton and Levin had told him several things; as plainly, to his suspicious mind, as if they had been shouted from the housetops in so many words.

First, Stanton was the dominant character—at least in the underground schemes which he was now certain were afoot in the carnival.

Second, Manson had a hold on Stanton and Levin. He had stood there, an ordinary and intrinsically valueless employee, and laid down the law to his employers. He had frightened Levin, which Groody would have sworn was no easy matter, and caused Stanton to temporize. And the more Groody thought about Stanton, the more he instinctively felt that the cripple was a dangerous man for all his pose.

Third, he himself had firmly established himself. Otherwise there would have been no delay in deciding whether or not Manson was to stay, for he had to fight Manson's guilty knowledge, not a mere mechanic.

As they started work on the plane Manson's belligerence had entirely disappeared. It was not hard to figure the big Irishman—his temper flared momentarily, and was gone. He simply wanted what he wanted when he wanted it, and was not the type who held a grudge. Furthermore, Groody felt safe in ticketing him as a more or less obvious man. He was not a dangerous criminal, nor was he a man capable of planning and executing a complicated maneuver of any kind whatsoever.

There was still much to do when three tired men appeared with a big canvas tarpaulin to set up over the ship. Manson informed him that this was always used in lieu of a hangar to protect the ship from the weather. The flyer and mechanic turned to and helped the canvasmen, for work on the ship was impossible until the canvas was up.

It was nearing mealtime when Miss Barrett, dressed becomingly in short skirt and sweater, approached and beckoned to Groody.

"Mr. Stanton wants to see you in his stateroom," she told him. "It's right next to the office on the car."

They walked through the now deserted midway. Groody noticed that the signs and false-fronts, as well as the pennants and gaudy decorations of the various attractions were all fresh and shining in immaculate colors. The merchandise offered as prizes was neat and attractively displayed, likewise. Pervading the whole outfit there was an air of prosperity and efficiency which contrasted strongly with the few weather-beaten open-air attractions he had known.

"I knew that Manson'd make trouble!" she said suddenly.

"Oh, I guess everything'll straighten out," returned Groody. For a moment he felt inclined to say something regarding Manson's hold on the two men, but caution prevailed.

She looked at him directly, and took his arm.

"I'm glad, in a way, you joined," she said.

Groody, his lines having been cast almost exclusively with the masculine half of the world, had a somewhat cautious attitude with women which was a compound of admitted lack of understanding and a strictly cynical point of view which was the result

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of his lack of contact with the highest type of womanhood. In general, he always wondered what a woman was after. Consequently, his reply was not what might be termed flirtatious.

"I haven't regretted it yet," he said.

He smiled, but the smile was not one to cause a flutter in any girl's bosom, and his eyes held a dispassionate question.

She said no more as they made their way between the canvas wall of the 'Hula Girls' show and the animal show-tent.

"Did you notice anything funny about this afternoon—the way Manson acted?" she asked suddenly.

"No," lied Groody.

"Well, I must go over to the office again—the tent, I mean," she said. "And please, Lieutenant Groody—if there's anything I can do—anything you want to know that I—I can help you out——"

Her stammering words dwindled to nothing beneath his steady regard, and without completing what she had started to say she turned and walked rapidly toward the office tent.

"I'm undoubtedly a hard-boiled, flinty-hearted reprobate who ought to be kicked, but I wonder just what the pretty steno. is up to?" he mused.

Groody was not the victim of egotism with regard to women. In fact, he leaned over backwards. When a girl smiled at him he did not preen himself on his fatal fascination for the sex. He began to wonder whether his necktie was untied or his garter hanging down.

"She's in a different class from the other inmates of this attraction, and hails a fellow human being of civilized tendencies, I guess," was his decision as he entered the car.

The door of Stanton's compartment was closed. Groody knocked, and was invited to enter.

The stateroom—a big one formed by making two compartments into one— surprized Groody. The one bunk was an upper, now folded, and the comparatively spacious abode was furnished with a good-looking rug, a Morris chair, a bookshelf and some autographed photographs of stage folk.

"How do you do, lieutenant," said Stanton, who was sitting in the Morris chair. He was arrayed in a royal purple lounging robe. Apparently Mr. Stanton was a bit of a sybarite. A quick glance at his books showed a preponderance of volumes authored by French and Italian masters whose works, in addition to being classics, were practically never included in a course of reading for the young. Casanova, Zola, Gautier, Boccaccio, and others were represented, as well as a considerable number of modern detective stories.

"Sit down," said Stanton. "I wanted to talk with you regarding—er—Manson."

"I thought so," remarked Groody.

"We, Levin and myself, would like to have you keep Manson as mechanic if there is any——"

"Absolutely not!"

Groody had mapped out his campaign, and the keeping of Manson was now only a small issue. He meant to force Stanton's hand.

"Why are you so insistent on the subject? Has it anything to do with the fight last evening?" Stanton went on gently.

"Very little. I've repeatedly said that I'm here because I see a chance to clean up the dough-re-me. I don't pretend to be a mechanic. I can't make money if the ship isn't working half the time. Manson isn't capable of keeping it working. And that's every bit of it."

"I see. Well, then how about hiring another mechanic—you see we consider the prestige of your reputation very valuable, Mr. Groody—and keeping Manson as a sort of figure-head?"

"I don't want Manson around!" stated Groody, looking steadily into Stanton's muddy brown eyes. "After what happened last night, and my being forced to recommend he be fired today, and with the knowledge that he wanted my job himself, I will not take chances of his deliberately doing something to get me out of the way. There's lots of things can be done to a ship——"

He left his sentence unfinished purposely. His words had not been sincere. He was planning to get some information. Out of the corner of his eye he was watching Stanton's crippled foot. That change in position he had noticed, and the ensuing lie, had opened up various speculations.

"I see. But I don't think you need to be afraid of that. Suppose we leave it that Manson, who is a valuable man to us and who wants to keep his job for personal reasons, becomes a figure-head and that you go ahead and hire a man that suits you as soon as possible, at our expense."

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"And suppose I refuse to do that?"

"Don't be unreasonable. I think you'll do it."

Groody was aware of the unreasonableness of his attitude, but his supposed fear of sabotage from Manson was a sufficient peg to hang his objections on.

"For the reasons stated, I will not have Manson in any capacity whatever nor fly a ship while he is connected with it in any way," he said coolly.

Stanton leaned back and put the tips of his fingers together. He was like an actor playing a part before an imaginary audience.

"Mr. Groody, you are a man we do not want to lose. In our—er—business, we hate to lose good men, and at the same time we must know enough about them to know that they are—er—reliable," he said in that husky voice of his. "We—er—took the liberty of investigating you somewhat more fully than you were perhaps aware of, and we found out so much that I believe you will reconsider your determination to—er—either leave the show or insist too strongly——"

"What did you find out?" inquired Groody evenly.

"A little matter connected with Mr. Thayer in San Antonio, and the transportation of smuggled drugs——"

"I see."

Groody blew a smoke ring and watched it for a moment.

"I don't know how you found that out, I'm sure," he lied. "But it seems you've got hold of something that might embarrass me. However, just to tell *you* something—listen: a friend of mine once made a bet he could pick up a sleeping rattler by the tail and kill him. He was overconfident, you see. The snake was somewhat more wakeful than he looked, I guess. Anyway, he got into action before he got bumped off. Get me? Well, you hear me rattle now. I can do damage if I have to. I don't want to. But if you think that because you've learned enough about me to give you a hold on me that I won't rear and kick if I don't get all that's coming to me, you're wrong. That little matter of the drugs be ——, if I'm not getting mine. So long as I get my just slice of whatever I engage in, I'm satisfied."

Stanton, hunched down in his chair, was watching the lanky flyer with a hint of interest in his expressionless eyes.

"Certainly, Mr. Groody, certainly. Don't think I was insinuating that because of this—er—regrettable incident we were planning to take advantage of you. In the matter of Manson, as I said——"

"I'll yield to you there, mostly because it's too small a matter to fight about, under the circumstances." Groody was making a retreat which would appear to be with honor, and yet to be the result of his knowledge that they were familiar with a past indiscretion as well. He wanted Stanton to think he was frightened, and yet defiant. "I think we can do business all right."

"I think so," smiled Stanton urbanely.

"Speaking of business," pursued Groody, "judging by the few lonesome people here today there won't be much for me."

"This is unusual," Stanton explained. "Because there is no fair here. This week is just a fill-in for us. Business will pick up later in the week, too. From now on we have a succession of county fairs and expositions and business will be excellent, I'm sure."

Groody got up.

"Well, good night! I'll use Manson for a few days."

"You won't have to bother with Manson long, perhaps," remarked Stanton huskily. "He's a simple man, Manson. He is jealous of his position. He enjoys being somewhat the buckaroo among the men of the carnival, and to drop from his high estate would be a severe blow. But as I say, maybe a way will be found whereby he may cease to trouble us."

Groody flashed a glance at him as he went out. Taking into account Manson's bullying tactics of the afternoon, and some subtle inflection in that cultivated voice, he felt that there was something sinister in Stanton's words.

"I don't quite believe I'd have played my hand as strong as Manson did," mused the flyer. "Those *hombres* are bad to fool with."

Which was a statement of simple accuracy.

## VII

AT TEN O'CLOCK Wednesday morning the ship was ready for its test flight. Groody was sitting nonchalantly on top of the fuselage, treating himself to a cigar before going up. He was likewise trying to convince himself that he

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had left out nothing in his recent inspection of the ship. The motor had warmed up perfectly, and he had looked over every conceivable nut, bolt and wire. And yet he had a feeling that the trip before him might hold an unusual element of danger.

In an effort to overlook no bets whatsoever, he had hit upon a plan which would prevent Manson or any one else tinkering with the ship without his knowledge. He had caused strict orders to be issued that no one was to go near the ship in his absence. Inasmuch as Levin issued the order, it would undoubtedly be obeyed. He had also impressed the fact on Manson that he was in no sense an exception. Manson had readily assured him that the rule was all right with him.

Then the flyer proceeded to set a trap. He had carefully raked the ground around the ship, until it was in a condition where any footprint would be apparent. He had succeeded in accomplishing this both nights so that he was unobserved. He remembered Ann Barrett's repeated warnings against Manson, and he was beginning to believe that she was trying her best to be his friend, at least.

And this morning there had been the mark of shoes around the ship. Furthermore, they had been men's shoes, smaller and more neat than the brogans worn by Manson, or any ordinary carnival employee. And last and most important, some of the tracks angled inward, and there were cane marks. Beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt, they were Stanton's footprints. And another thing which caused Groody's eyes to narrow and his lips to curve was the fact that some of the tracks showed that the one foot did not always angle inward. Stanton had visited the ship some time during the night, and Stanton was certainly not a cripple.

What had been his object? Groody was positive that the ship, as it stood, was in flying condition. And Stanton would have no motive in trying to fix things so that he, Groody, would be killed—rather the other way. It was undoubtedly just a visit of curiosity, and Stanton, of course, would feel himself immune from orders of any kind. But why come at night?

It might be something to do with Manson, and yet Groody could imagine nothing of that kind. Tampering with the ship would not do Manson any damage. And the ship, he was certain, had not been tampered with.

He strove to think of any means whereby his real purpose in joining the carnival could have been detected. There was nothing incriminating in his trunk, and furthermore it had been disturbed but once. He decided that there was no need of considering that phase of the subject. As additional proof, Ann had told him the night before, when she had joined him on a tour of the carnival, that both Stanton and Levin were very glad that Groody had joined the show.

He threw his cigar away impatiently.

"Well, let's start her," he said to Manson, who was taking his ease at full length on the ground.

Manson got to his feet, and his chief climbed into the cockpit. He turned on the gas pet-cock, saw with a glance that the switch was off, and called—

"Off!"

Manson spun the propeller, finally shouting—

"Contact!"

"Contact!" repeated Groody, and snapped on the switch.

As the powerful Manson spun the propeller again the pilot jazzed the throttle, and the hundred and sixty horse power motor caught. It idled along gently, and the gages jumped. Oil stood at forty pounds, air pressure at three, and the thermometer at sixty-five, centigrade. The effect of the previous warm-up had not yet worn off, so the thermometer lost no time in getting up to eighty degrees.

Groody slowly increased the speed of the motor—it was one of the types which had won its spurs over the lines—and listened to the hum of the cylinders with strained attention. It fired perfectly on either magneto, and ran with a marked absence of vibration.

He slowed it down to idling gradually, to avoid fouling the spark-plugs, and nodded to Manson, who crawled under the wings and kicked the blocks from the wheels.

Groody put on a pair of goggles, not bothering with a helmet, and took a look to make sure that all was clear ahead. He noticed the carnival people climbing out of the gaudily painted cars to watch.

It was not a bad place for a take-off. The midway paralleled the southern stretch of the race-track, in the center of which he

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was, and ahead of him was the low inner rail of the track, then the outer rail, followed by a short, rough field and then the high fence surrounding the grounds. This fence itself was frail, and if necessary the ship could burst through it without particular damage to the pilot.

Groody fed the throttle slowly, his hand pressed forward on the stick, and in a moment the sturdy craft had flattened itself with tail in the air and was trundling across the even terrane at sixty miles an hour. A hundred yards from the first fence it was off the ground, flying level a foot above the earth. Groody lifted it smoothly across the fences, held it level for a moment to pick up speed, and then hurdled the boundary fence in a graceful arc with speed to spare.

He wasted no time in turning back toward the field, in the event that the perfectly functioning motor should miss. The tachometer showed sixteen hundred revolutions, and he throttled to fifteen hundred.

Three circles of the field told him all he wanted to know. He had apparently done an excellent job on the rigging, for barring slight left wing heaviness the Jenny purred along with vibrationless smoothness. Higher and ever higher it went, until the altimeter showed three thousand feet.

Then, partly for his own satisfaction and partly for the effect on those onlookers below, Groody proceeded to "strut his stuff" in the air. He pressed forward on the stick until the motor was roaring like mad and the struts quivered and the wires shrilled a protest. He pulled back smoothly, and the ship swept upward in a wide, graceful curve.

There was not a miss in the motor as the Jenny went on its back and then swooped downward—Groody had flown his loop without the semblance of a stall at the top. As the ship righted itself he used the extra speed for two fast barrel-rolls that sent the ship corkscrewing through the air in continuous horizontal turns. Then a quick pull-back, and as the ship, nose in the air, stalled, a thrust at the rudder caused it to fall off sideward. No sooner had it started than he gave it opposite rudder, and the nose whirled upward and over on the other side. The ship had turned on its tail in a perfect pinwheel. Time after time he did that—it was a falling leaf, refined into a wonderfully effective and beautiful bit of aerial acrobatics.

Groody's famous upside-down work—upside-down rolls, rolls-and-a-half, and dives—were impossible with the ship he was in, due to lack of power. But all that the training plane could do, and more than most pilots would have thought it capable of doing, it went through. There was a smoothness about it that made it seem as though some living creature of the upper air was lazily enjoying itself playing about in the sky. The motor alternately increased and decreased its roar, so gradually that it seemed to always be working easily, and the ship curved and twisted apparently in unextended ease.

At a thousand feet Groody sent it into a two-turn tailspin, and brought it out at five hundred feet. He circled over the town, where the streets were thickly sprinkled with motionless onlookers, and gave them a chance to read the big-lettered sign on the lower wings. Then he swept around a few hundred yards west of the fairgrounds, and straightened out for his landing. As the nosed-down plane dived for the field his hand gradually drew the throttle back. Th perfect judgment of speed, distance and diving angle showed plainly as the shining craft dropped over the fence and hit the ground smoothly less than fifty yards from the obstacle. It stopped rolling with space to spare.

Stanton, Levin, and two other men, who later proved to be in charge of the rides and tent-shows, respectively, were waiting by the canvas hangar as he taxied up to it. Groody could see Manson's grin and his shining eyes as he grabbed one wing to turn the ship. The pilot turned off the gas petcock and let the motor run itself out before snapping off the switch.

"Awful pretty work, sir!" said Manson, a new respect in his voice.

Groody received the admiring comments of the other men, and then said—

"Contract all set?"

"Sure!" said Levin. "Any time you say."

"In place of carrying passengers this afternoon we want you to make a trip over to Brandon and Shelby, two towns that you can cover in a fifty mile circle," said Stanton, leaning heavily on his cane. "Manson can go with you and shower both towns with some circulars we've got ready. It'll pay you good dividends for the time lost in increased patronage later in the week. If you could do some stunts, too——"

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"I guess that could be arranged. Ship seems to be O.K. as soon as I get rid of a little wing-heaviness on the left side," returned Groody.

"Don't stunt over town," barked Levin. "Just outside o' town, like you did here's just as good, and there ain't no chance o' doin' any damage if something goes flooey. Get me? Don't want lawsuits."

"That's sense," nodded Groody.

"Glad we got you," Levin went on tersely. "Eller couldn't stunt. Great advertisin' in you, every way. We'll give you three dollars a ride instead o' two and a half. All right?"

"Fine, thanks!"

"Take off about one o'clock this afternoon?" asked Stanton, his manner and voice a startling change from Levin's quick, clipped words and harsh voice.

"O.K!"

At one o'clock, with Manson in the back seat armed with advertising circulars, they were on their way to Brandon, twelve miles from Parkerton. The rough, rolling country showed not the slightest sign of a landing field for nearly ten minutes. Groody kept a watchful eye on the ground below, for he was one of those flyers who do not like to waste a minute in case of an emergency. He always knew exactly what clearing he was going to head for if the motor should fail.

As Brandon came in sight ahead he saw several small fields which were possibilities for a landing, and relaxed in his seat. He was wearing a helmet this trip, and in one corner of his mouth was an unlighted cigar. He circled over the little town once, to make sure that people were watching, and then pointed for the edge of town. As they came over open fields he turned in his seat and looked at Manson.

With his right hand he signified that he was going to loop. Manson nodded, his ruddy face a bit pale. Groody judged that very little stunting had been incorporated in Manson's short experience.

Groody handled a ship as instinctively as he handled the muscles of his body. In idle curiosity he continued to sit sidewise in the seat, his head turned to watch how Manson would take the loop. They were a safe twenty-five hundred feet high.

He nosed down, judging the amount of speed instinctively, and grinned reassuringly at the Irishman, who was rigid in the rear cockpit. Still watching him, his hand drew the stick back slowly, and in a moment the ship was curving over on its back.

The upside-down position felt as natural to Groody as though the ship were roaring along level. A hundred times he had watched a cadet around a loop, alert for any signs of panic. They sometimes grabbed the stick in the backseat when they found themselves upside down. And never, to his dying day, could he think of the events of the next few seconds without a deep feeling of thankfulness that he had watched Manson.

Just as the Jenny was falling over on its back he saw Manson's face blanch, and through the parted lips a scream of terror cut through the roar of the motor. The mechanic grabbed at the cowling as his body started leaving the plane, but too late.

Groody, partially turned in the seat with his right arm resting on the cowling, did not consciously realize what was happening. His arm shot out just in time to grasp one clawing hand. With a grip of steel his fingers closed on a big wrist. With the plane upside down, he twisted himself cruelly, and in a daze his other hand came to the rescue just before the terrible strain of Manson's full weight dragged at him.

Groody was accustomed to flying emergencies, but the next few seconds were like some horrible dream. The ship, out of control, hung on its back. With the strain of Manson's body almost pulling his right arm out of joint, Groody kept his head and with his feet kicked back at the stick. The earth was a reeling, drunken panorama, and that terrible weight was rapidly getting the better of his strength.

With a gasp of relief he felt the ship staggering out of the loop, rudderless and swaying from side to side. Manson's body, held close to the ship because the mechanic had succeeded in catching one foot beneath the cowling, swung forward, half-sliding, half in the air, and the force of it knocked Groody forward. One knee hooked itself around his neck, and then his grasp on the man's wrist was torn loose as Manson clawed for a hold on the side of the cockpit.

The ship was diving with tremendous speed now and Groody, his head pulled backward by Manson's leg-grip until he could not see anything but the upper center section, found the stick and rudder



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and brought the ship level by flying sense alone.

He cut the throttle and yelled—

"Get back in the seat!"

The sudden peace of softly idling motor and gradually diving ship seemed heavenly. Bit by bit Manson got back in the seat. Below there was a level close-cropped field which looked like a good landing field. Without hesitation Groody, diving very gradually, circled it and decided to land.

Had Manson's belt come unloosened, or had the man been fool enough to forget to belt himself? Or did those footprints of the night before mean anything? The pilot got control of himself and tried to think connectedly and coolly. He looked around at Manson.

Never did he remember having seen a face so demoniacal as the countenance that met his eyes. The big fellow was trembling like a leaf, and the full face seemed flabby and pasty. But behind the goggles those little eyes were the eyes of a man gone amuck. Manson's ham-like hands were grasping the cowling until the knuckles were white, and there was tenseness in every line of his body.

Groody dropped his ship over the fence in a stall landing, and found that the field was as good as he had thought. No sooner had he touched the ground than two great hands closed around his throat.

"Now, —— you—" came an animal-like snarl.

For a moment Groody was so surprized that he could only gasp and try to think.

The ship was slowing to a stop, turning slightly, and he mechanically gave it rudder to keep it straight. Then he came to himself with a snap. He was being choked to death!

His body twisted and his hand tore at the fingers around his throat. Manson's convulsed face was close to his now, and animal-like grunts and snarled blasphemy came to his roaring ears. The pilot's mind cleared, and in a flash his right hand found the fire-extinguisher on the front cowling.

With all the force he could muster in the narrow space he brought the filled metal cylinder back and succeeded in connecting forcefully with his assailant's head. With the last remnants of his strength he hit again, and the cruel fingers around his throat relaxed.

He unsnapped the belt and twisted free. Just in time he ducked a terrible blow that sprawled Manson over the narrow strip of cowling between the two seats. A straight jab to the man's unprotected jaw gave him a respite sufficient to get out of the cockpit and on the ground to meet the next assault. If ever he had seen murder in a man's eyes it was in Manson's.

"What the —— the matter with you?" he shouted. "Wait a——"

"Wait for nothin'!" bellowed the infuriated mechanic, and vaulted over the side of the rear cockpit.

Groody waited not on the order of his fighting. Before Manson had regained his balance Groody had him flat on the ground with a dexterous combination of tripping and neck-hold. For a moment he had to devote his whole attention to holding the wriggling bulk below him. Finally the gasping Irishman ceased his abortive efforts, but the blood-shot eyes burned up into the cool gray ones above with undiminished fury.

"Now what's the idea?" queried Groody with a meancing edge to his voice.

"Tried to dump me, you ——, didn't yuh?" snarled Manson. "So help me, if ever I git up I'll kill yuh with my bare hands! You——"

Groody shut off the flow of words by the simple procedure of using his elbow as a gag.

"I don't blame you for not being able to think *much*, but you ought to be able to use what few brains you've got," he announced coldly. "Who —— near had his arm pulled out of the socket holding you in, you poor dumb-bell? What was the matter—belt come loose?"

For a moment Manson, drawing in great gulps of air, did not answer. His red-streaked eyes flamed up into Groody's, and gradually some of the animal madness died out of them. The man had been insane with terror.

Groody, his elbow removed, said impatiently—

"Well?"

"The wire brace—it was filed off where it goes through the belt," roared Manson, working himself into a fury again. "And the man that did it——"

"Sure, you want to kill him. Do you now have a faint recollection of the fact that, with all due modesty, I saved your life?"

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Gradually Manson's slow-working brain came to that conclusion.

"Then who done it? —— him——"

"Are you ready to get up and act civilized?" demanded Groody.

"Yes, sir," agreed Manson sullenly.

The flyer let him up, and then said—

"I took steps to see that the footprints of anybody that came around the ship during the night would be noticeable, and some one was there. I raked the ground smooth, and I know. However, let's have a look at that belt."

It was as Manson had said. The belt, like all of the type, was of wide, strong canvas, fastening below the seat on each side. It was connected to the steel brace on the frame of the ship by a heavy wire triangle, the flat apex of which went through the opening in the steel brace and the base through the belt, which is folded over and strongly sewn around the wire.

The base of this triangle had been filed off, leaving perhaps a quarter inch on each end, just enough to hook on the belt at each end and thus give the appearance of perfect safety. By putting each end in the openings of the belt and then yanking, Groody found out that a five pound pull would cause the two stiff wire projections to give and thus slip out of the belt, leaving it entirely unanchored on that side. It was devilish in its effectiveness and ingenuity.

The stooping, worn-out Stanton stood convicted of an attempt at murder. Those words of his about Manson not bothering them much longer had come perilously close to being the truth—and Groody himself had been in a position where, by reason of his fight with Manson and the known bad blood between them, he would almost certainly be charged with deliberate murder if the filed wire were discovered.

"Oh, how they planned to rope and hog-tie me!" he told himself with a queer tingle running up and down his spine.

"Clever, eh?" he said slowly.

Manson wiped his beefy face with his hand.

"I—I'm sorry about grabbin' yuh, sir, but I was fair crazy. God!"

"Now listen. From your actions yesterday, you've got something on Levin and Stanton. You talked too —— much. They're scared of you. And I believe they're the ones that are responsible for this!"

The shaken Manson, who was still quivering in the reaction, took time to digest this. Groody, noticing out of the corner of his eye that there were two men approaching the ship across the next field, went to the cockpit and cut off the still idling motor. He was wondering whether it would be wise to divulge his identity to Manson after telling him what he knew about Stanton, and what he suspected about the activities of the same gentleman.

In return for this, would Manson tell him the facts on which his hold on Levin and Stanton were based, and would his information and help be valuable enough to compensate for the chance he took in letting the man in on his secret? Life itself was the stake if his judgement was wrong.

"Y'say there was footprints around the ship this mornin'?"

"Yes, and I looked over the ship from end to end before I took it up. Naturally, I didn't catch that belt. Nobody in the world could, except by being a mind-reader or by accident. And I know who those footprints belonged to!"

"Who was it?" asked Manson eagerly. His hairy hands twitched at his side.

Groody took a thoughtful moment before answering.

"Before I say any more Manson, suppose we come to an agreement. You know now, I presume, that it's ridiculous to think I was responsible for trying to kill you. I'd have tried to dump you out in the woods somewhere, probably, and I certainly wouldn't have saved you. Agree to that?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Manson shamefacedly. "And—and thanks, sir, fur what yuh did. I know I ain't been no friend to yuh—drinkin' and all, an' then you tryin' to fire me——"

"That's all over. And you know yourself you're no —— good as a mechanic. Well, that's settled. And you agree with me that you popping off about how much you know and threatening Stanton and Levin means that in all probability they were behind this?"

"Yes, sir."

The Irishman's eyes were like pin-points, and he was following his chief's words with painful attention. The oncoming men were clambering over the fence now, so Groody said—

"Let's get a little way from the ship."

They walked toward the center of the field.

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"Knowing this, you agree that probably the carnival is going to be a —— dangerous place for you with those fellows after you, don't you?"

This was apparently a new thought to Manson.

"Be the powers, yuh're right there!"

"All right then—if I should tell you that I'm after their scalps too, would you like to help? Because the footsteps around the ship last night were Stanton's. That crippled foot of his showed plainly, and his cane marks!"

"I thought so!" said Manson murderously. "I'll settle *his* hash!"

"Sure. But not right away. Are you with me in putting those birds in the jug?"

"What're *you* after?" Manson asked bluntly.

"I'm in the secret service," said Groody evenly. "And I'm planted with this outfit to get the men responsible for a series of robberies in the last few months, from Texas on up here."

"The secret service!" gasped Manson, stopping dead in his tracks.

"The secret service. And I'm trying to get the gang of criminals that are responsible for these crimes. Don't get scared—if you help out you'll be all right. I've become convinced that Stanton is probably big chief. But right now I haven't got enough on him to make a move—not definite enough. I want to get him and anybody else in on it *with the goods*. It might be a —— hard job to convict him of anything through a set of footprints and with no evidence but my own. That is, if he's as clever as I think he is.

"Here's my scheme. I could get you right now—I've got a gun in my pocket. And you don't know how many secret agents there are around that show, and how quick they'd jump if *anything* happened to me. So don't try to fool with me."

"It don't need no friends to keep me from that, sir. I ain't forgettin' you been square——"

"I'm not afraid of a double cross from you, Manson. Now suppose we work together. First you tell me all you know about this outfit. Then we go back as though nothing had happened. You go into Stanton and Levin and tell them that you discovered that filed brace wire at the start of the trip, and held yourself in the ship, being warned ahead of time by your knowledge.

"Pretend you're convinced I was responsible for filing the wire, and that you want to kill me, see? And then say that this morning I was talking about slipping away from the show—that I'd told you that when too much of a man's past career was known to his boss that it was time for him to get out, unless there's big money in sight, see? You don't know just why I tell you to say that, but I'll explain later. If they think I'm considering leaving on account of their knowing so much about me and my dissatisfaction with prospects of making big money, it may work out into two things—they'll try to work me into some big dough to keep me, because I'm valuable to 'em, and they may let up on you because you're a substitute flyer and they'll figure that you'd be a good man to get rid of me if I needed bumping off through getting too gay.

"However, you can play safe just the same—don't get into any dark places late at night and keep a sharp watch out generally. We'll be forewarned about any further attempts on the ship by the same method I've been using."

He went on to explain the planted letter in his trunk, purporting to show that he had run afoul of the law before, and bit by bit, sitting on the ground, the slow-witted Irishman took in the various facets to the situation.

"Now what do you know that you're so proud of?" demanded Groody.

"Well, sir, it ain't so much when you come to think of it definite-like," admitted Manson. "But then it's somethin'. Eller was an officer o' the Air Service in the same outfit I was supply sergeant of. Well, he got in some trouble sellin' Army stuff, and I helped 'im out—I could, you see, bein' supply sergeant—so's all he had to do was resign, see, instead o' gettin' court-martialed. He havin' been in the carnival business before, and me too, kinda brought us together.

"Well, this show was winterin' in San Antone and him and me got thinkin' and suggested this airplane idee to 'em. Then we found out they was all primed for it beforehand, and was lookin' for a flyer that suited. Well, Eller suited, bein' a natural-born crook, I s'pose. And naturally he took me, as mechanic, and kept teachin'

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me flyin' while the show was still winterin'.

"You know as much as I do about them robberies, so all I can say is that every time one o' them robberies was pulled in the town where we was the plane left right away, carryin' some bird that was a stranger to us but corresponded to the description of one o' the crooks, see? And in the case them jobs that was pulled in near-by towns, the ship was always somewheres a few miles from town. Once it brought back a stranger, and Eller says later they'd flown over another town near a hundred miles away and dropped a package—the swag, I'll bet—to some bird in a field there. The other time it brings back old Stanton himself. They dropped somethin' in another town that time too."

"Just about what I thought," said Groody slowly, his eyes on the small knot of people who were gathered around the plane. "Were all these 'strangers' different, or did you ever see the same man twice?"

"One feller was around twice—the rest was all different."

"I see. And Stanton and Levin know that you have connected up these trips of the plane with the robberies, and that's what enabled you to get away with holding 'em up, eh?"

"Yes, sir. You see, Eller tells 'em I got to be in on it, so's I can take his place if anything happens and all that stuff. He was primin' me and them to have two ships, see?"

"Very plainly. And how is it that the rest of the show doesn't connect up the airplane with those robberies?"

"Too dumb, and besides they ain't got any basis, see? The ship is always goin' out over other towns for advertisin', generally a trip every day or so. There ain't nothin' unusual in the ship leavin' and comin' back any time. Course, everybody knows the mob that follows the show—these here cheap grifters that you ain't seen work yet—and they figure the robberies is pulled by some o' them or by outsiders that's usin' the carnival as a blind, see? There ain't nobody connects up Stanton or anybody with 'em. These strangers just slipped in the grounds and into the plane without anybody noticin' anything."

"What about this man with the scar—this great big fellow, sort of stout and tall, with a scar on his chin? Never seen him?"

"No sir! And Eller didn't know nothin' about him, neither. That's somethin' nobody ain't in on. This bird must be good!"

"And no airplane getaway, either," mused Groody.

"No, sir."

"How much did Stanton and Levin ever directly admit to Eller? That is, did they tell 'im in so many words his trip was to help a crook make a getaway, drop the loot, and so forth?"

"No, sir. He was just told where to be and what to do, and he gets two hundred a trip and I get fifty to keep our mouths shut. Nobody around the show ever seen any o' these strange passengers. 'Course, Eller and me knew what was comin' off, and these bozos knew we knew, but now that it's all over, yuh see, how are these fellers gonna be caught? The passengers can't be produced. Eller says there's always some scheme at the other end—land in some lonesome spot and a automobile all ready and that stuff so's the chances are this bird just disappears."

"Well, we'd better get back and take off. Where are those circulars we were going to distribute?"

"Under the seat. I don't believe they got dumped out. You ain't gonna stunt no more——"

"No," grinned Groody. "But we can fix that belt with some rope."

While a growing knot of interested people watched, and asked questions, they used some safety wire in the tool-kit to fix the belt, and cranked the motor. Within a few minutes they were on their way. The small circulars had not been lost, and they covered the two towns with a rain of paper.

Groody, lounging loosely in the front seat and flying mechanically, was busy fitting all the facts at his disposal into a unified whole. That night he wrote Service a long letter, telling him how things stood in detail.

It's a great mess. And Stanton, who without question is the "master mind" as we detectives say, we've got in the salubrious state where he thinks he knows it all and doesn't know anything. Levin, I believe, is just a practical carnival man with a split on the proceeds, but confining his professional attention to running the show. Stanton, as I said, thinks he has a club over my head and really has not; thinks that I am entirely ignorant of the past performances of this gang, which I am not; thinks that Manson thinks I am trying to kill him, which he does not; thinks that I am ignorant of the attempt on Manson's life, and that he, Stanton, was the

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one that did it, which I am not; thinks that Manson and I are enemies instead of allies. In other words, I hold all the cards. If I make a mistake playing them, I wouldn't give a piece torn off the corner of a Russian ruble for my neck. If I play them right, we ought to have them dead to rights.

As for the prominent big fellow with the scar who is robber-in-chief of this bunch, under Stanton's direction, nobody knows anything about him. However, when the first job breaks, I'll try to catch him. It might be a good thing to look up Stanton if any of your agents can do it. He used to be an actor, as I said, and he's fairly tall, so stooped he seems almost hump-backed, has that fake crippled foot, which still puzzles me, because I believe it is a fake, and is bald. Probably he was an actor under a different name.

As I said, it must be that Schrader spies out the land, but maybe not in a way that makes him criminally liable. Sounds things, see what I mean? There are scouts somewhere—must be. If I were you and had nothing more important to do, I'd be in town when we get in next Sunday for that fair. Manson says the rumor is that "the mob's on the loose" next week, which they are not here, and from a hint or two Stanton has dropped I believe there may be a big job on for our attention likewise.

Groody finished the letter, sealed and addressed it, and prepared to go uptown to mail it. In his contented moments he was addicted to the more spacious methods of speech to express his ideas, and now he said, half-aloud:

"Attempting the divulgement of illegal machinations is evidently a profession infested with interest. Now if next week proves up——"

## VIII

AT FIVE O'CLOCK the next Saturday afternoon he and Manson were winging their way over lofty, wooded mountains, following the snake-like course of a river, toward a town called Valley. He was armed with a crude map of the fairgrounds, which the indefatigable Schrader had furnished, together with the information that the fair committee had ruled that there would be no parking of automobiles within the limits of the track, and that therefore a good landing place right in the center of things was available.

The days since his conversion of Manson had been uneventful, compared to the first days of his connection with the Levin-Willet shows, but far from uninteresting. He had had two opportunities to talk with Manson, and both conversations were illuminating, particularly concerning Ann Barrett.

Having nothing in particular to do, Groody had formed the habit of lounging around the midway in the evening, seeing what he could see. Invariably the comely, hard-faced little stenographer had joined him. They had visited all the attractions once or twice, and she had explained some of the more devious points to him. Those numerous games where, for a dime, one was sure to get some prize and was inveigled into believing that one of the more valuable exhibits might come one's way, she told him would change next week to games where there was but one winning number, and the losers got nothing.

Most of them would change to straight money prizes, and every wheel would be supplied with an automatic control, worked from under the booth by the operator's foot, so that the chance of having any but the smallest played numbers would be slight. The drop-case, the spot-the-spot, the set-spindle—he grew to know them all. There were numberless variations.

Groody decided, however, as they trooped around the show, that Miss Barrett, very unobtrusively, was trying to pump him. It was not at all obvious, and probably meant nothing, but she seemed trying to account for Groody's presence with the show. She had suggested that he might be a writer looking for local color, but he had laughed and always made the same reply—that he was there to make money. As to his past life and future plans, he was very vague.

It was Manson who had made him eternally thankful that he had not yielded to the lure of a confidant, nor accepted thinly veiled invitations to romantic episodes. For Manson had said:

"I ain't tryin' to butt in none, but my skirt was tellin' me Fancy Nan Barrett and you have been around together quite some."

"Why yes, she's been pretty friendly, and told me a lot of stuff about these gyp joints," returned Groody. "Why?"

"Why, I just wanted give yuh a steer," said Manson hesitantly. "She's Stanton's woman around the show."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know all right; my own eyes and the girl told me."

"I see. Well, I haven't been doing any chasing."

Manson looked up quickly.

"Been kinda curious, has she?"

"Well, now that you mention it——"

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"Thought so," nodded Manson, very much pleased with his own acuteness. "You ain't told her nothin'?"

"Not a thing important."

"Ain't slipped no hints about somethin' mysterious or nothin'?" persisted Manson.

"No."

"Good. All she is is a come-on for Stanton. That's just another way he's usin' to see whether you're O.K." stated Manson positively. "Eller an' I went through somethin' the same when we joined. If that wasn't so you'd o' had Stanton on your neck long ago!"

And thereafter Groody had been doubly careful. He congratulated himself on the fact that he had not given the girl the slightest opening. It had been a surprize to him to get that angle on her—she was a good actress. Manson had expatiated on her professional skill and criminal proclivities.

"One o' the slickest badger-game women and black-mail artists in captivity," he had said. "She ain't needin' to work now, but it's ten to one she's in on this game—her bein' in the office and Stanton's sweetheart."

In another conversation Manson had urged him, if possible, to get into the privilege car when some townsmen of Valley were entertained.

"The word's gone out that the town is all right and that the mob'll be on the loose," he said. "That means Schrader has got 'em figured and that they'll stand a little easin' o' the itch in their palms or somethin' like that. There'll be some police an' others—any one Schrader has figured can protect us—invited down to a dinner or somethin', an' the booze'll flow free. You may be able to get in on it, an' it may show you somethin'. You're valuable t' the show, and might get away with it."

Groody was now certain of his value to the show. His name, picture and record had been spread in the Parkerton papers, and as a result he had done a very satisfactory business the last three days—his personal share had been over thirty dollars a day. And he knew that special placards had been prepared for Valley.

It rubbed him the wrong way to be a publicity feature of that kind, but it seemed necessary. He had carried out his part by kicking against the amount of money he was making, appearing dissatisfied that something bigger wasn't brewing, and Stanton had told him, in that gentle way of his:

"You won't kick on next week's proceeds. There'll be plenty of passengers, and maybe a side trip that will mean a couple of hundred."

"What kind of a trip?" Groody had asked interestedly.

"Oh, just a trip," the man had replied with a slow smile, and Groody had nodded satisfiedly.

"I'm not curious if there's two hundred in it," he had said.

He had become more and more certain that the rank and file of the show had no idea whatever of the undercurrent of important crimes. He had spent hours listening to the liquor-loosened tongues in the privilege car of a morning, and had laid around with groups of carnival people after meals, listening to their casual conversation. Narrow escapes from the law, the revealing, by accident or otherwise, of certain fake freaks like the "half-woman," and quick breaks out of towns before the powers of the law got busy—of such things was their conversation woven.

It was interesting, in more ways than one, to get the viewpoint of these squalid denizens of the lowest known form of show business. There was only one creed—to get away with all they could and be safe.

Famous short-changers, three-card monte men, ingenious new methods of inveigling the people into departing with their money without getting a run for it, that wonderful "mob" which had cleaned up for two years with the Jacot-Brady Shows and made themselves and the owners rich by advanced pocket-picking, safe-breaking, burglary and confidence work—Groody now had a speaking acquaintance with all these legendary heroes of the gentle art of buncombe.

He came out of his revery as he saw a long bridge across the river. The second bridge, according to his Rand MacNally map, should lead into Valley. He was flying below the level of the towering mountains, straight down the river valley. It increased the distance, but the only possible landing-fields were along the river-bank, and Groody was far too much of a veteran to waste his limited chances of beating the game of the air on avoidable risks.

The ship roared around a sharp curve

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of the river, and not more than a hundred feet to the left a jutting cliff projecting from the side of the mountains gave the passengers an idea of the speed of the ship.

Valley burst into view as they rounded the rock abutment. The foot-hills did not commence until nearly two miles from the river, and on that small plain sprawled a sizable little city, surrounded by small but level fields which broke up into mere clearings as they reached the edge of the rolling low-lands.

The fairgrounds stuck out of the picture like a sore thumb. The oval track gleamed white as snow against the green of its center, and a long row of barns formed part of the northern boundary of the grounds.

There were several large frame buildings, clustered a short distance from the southern point of the track, and there were already a great many shacks and tents which undoubtedly housed concessions independent of the carnival. There were many roads, continuations of streets of the town, which led by fairly direct routes to the fairgrounds. It was a smiling scene, and one of ant-like industry, for there were many vehicles going to and from the scene of the fair, and the grounds themselves were occupied by a myriad scurrying black figures.

Gradually these specks became more quiet as the ship came overhead. Groody, half through his feeling of satisfaction and content and half for the advertising, gave them a treat. He stunted down to a thousand feet in a bewildering concoction of spins, rolls, loops and sudden re-enversments which left Manson, in the rear, looking white and sick.

At a thousand feet the flyer throttled the motor and circled in a shallow dive. There was one ditch which ran in a jagged line diagonally across the short way of the oval, petering out perhaps half-way to the other fence. A much-worn path splitting the oval squarely in half was etched plainly. To make absolutely certain of his terrane he side-slipped down, straightened out, and sped across the prospective landing field barely a foot off the ground. The path was not a depression, and by landing diagonally he could escape that ditch.

The approaches were only fair. The high buildings at the southern point of the track were scarcely a hundred yards from the track itself, and on the other end just outside the boundary fence itself and perhaps less than seventy five yards from the track there were high wires. Landings and take-offs must be made toward the buildings, with a quick turn right off the ground on a take-off to straighten the ship for open spaces at each end of the row of buildings. West of the track was the midway, or what would be the midway when the carnival arrived. The railroad siding was on that side.

Groody half-circled, well back of the wires and three hundred feet high, and then in a shallow, widely curving dive straightened his ship to land toward the buildings, headed almost parallel to the ditch. By this method the ship's roll took it just beyond the end of the little gully, which was deep enough to have turned it over.

"Stake it down and don't get far away from it," Groody told Manson.

"I'll be right on the job!" stated Manson, who was feeling very contented with himself. A man who traveled from town to town by air was sure to be a personage to the crowd which would shortly surround the ship, and also, and more important, to the obesely charming Miss Bellair. Manson liked his charmers on a large scale.

He helped Groody unwire his suit-case, which operation was completed before the advance guard of spectators arrived.

A stout, moon-faced man with a merry eye and a nose which bloomed in a bright shade of crimson that harmonized with his pink face, came up at a half-trot, escorted by several other men who wore badges.

"This is Lieutenant Groody, I suppose," he puffed, wiping a totally bald head with a drenched handkerchief and smiling until his eyes were closed by rolls of fat. "I'm Framer, Fair Secretary."

Groody admitted his identity, shook hands with the various fair officials, who wore ornate badges, and submitted to a close inspection without protest.

"Glad you're here, sir!" declared Framer in his wheezy, throaty voice. "I trust you will find it worth your while, too. I had a brother in France myself. You'll have to meet him. This gentleman here," pointing to a long-haired, wild-eyed youth who had just arrived, "is a representative of the *Bugle*, our local paper. Hope you'll give him some stuff—good publicity for the fair and for you."

Groody swallowed his abhorrence and gave the reporter an outline of his career,

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an estimate of the future of air travel, and further statements as to the safety of all passengers who rode with him. This being over he accepted the rotund Framer's offer to transport himself and his suit-case to the hotel, where Framer assured him that a room had been reserved for him as a result of a wire for one night's reservation.

Groody declined an invitation to spend the evening with the Fair Secretary.

"I've been flying all day, and am tired as ——," he apologized. "Some other night—tickled to death!"

As he registered he cast his eye over the signatures before his own and found that Service was in 431. The curious eyes of the lobby-loungers followed his khaki-clad form as he went to the elevator. His identity was evidently well-known in Valley, and a poster hung up by the elevator indicated the cause of his fame.

There was a picture of him in full uniform, and a flamboyant summary of his record, together with the information that he would carry passengers all that week at the fair. The poster, in a manner of speaking, possessed neither well-bred reserve nor the shrinking modesty of the violet. It came out boldly and admitted that the greatest flyer in the country would condescend to carry aspiring Valleyites heavenward.

Groody changed his clothes and in ordinary civilian attire knocked on the door of 431. The next instant he was shaking hands with the chubby Service.

"Well, you've sure been burning up the road," Tom assured him. "How do you like your job?"

"It's a right copious position, this sleuthing," returned Groody.

"Anything new?"

"Not much."

"Spin me the yarn!" commanded Tom as Groody started a cigar on its way back to ashes.

Groody spun obediently. It was a relief to talk freely—not until that moment had he fully realized the constant taut strain he had been under in his efforts to anticipate every possible contingency and to navigate squarely in the middle of his perilous path.

Service sat motionless, his round, innocent-looking eyes burning through the glasses as he concentrated every faculty on Groody's story. He asked many questions, some of them seemingly irrelevant, and Groody could see, as plainly as though Service's thoughts had been pictured on a screen, how the man was fitting every detail into place, sorting and choosing and pigeonholing them in that remarkable mind of his.

"That's all there is, there is not another bit," Groody concluded.

"And a —— sight more than I hoped for so soon in my wildest dreams, George," said Service absently.

"Stanton the real power and brains, Levin in on it, this chirruping chickabidee Barrett likewise, and Schrader almost certainly," Service summed up. "They import some expert for a few hours, and then whisk him away by airplane, getting rid of the swag either by letting this bird take it with him, or dropping it to a confederate a long way from where it was obtained, and within an hour or two. Stanton an ex-actor, suspected of faking a crippled foot. George, that may be and probably is a false lead. The fact that the foot isn't always in that unnatural position may not mean a thing except that he has some slight movement of it."

"Seemed to happen once when he was off guard and another time when he was alone," stated Groody.

"And the man with a scar is still a mystery," ruminated Service. "In every robbery they had a few minutes, at least, for a getaway, which makes the scheme watertight, so far as the accomplice is concerned. He flits in and out of town within a few minutes. And the big man has a few minutes to disappear in, which he does with neatness and dispatch. He doesn't have a chance to leave town—or didn't in at least one case, and yet he can't be found. That means, to my mind,——"

Groody waited to see what Service would make of the problem. He had a far-fetched solution himself, but he wanted Service to present an independent surmise without being influenced by his own.

Tom, however, did not pursue his line of thought further.

"I believe your scheme is perfect," he said at last. "Wait until this trip comes off this week. You let me know where it's going to be, and I'll be there. Whenever you get there, with or without my help, take quick action against whoever your passenger is and search him. If it's the usual thing, we'll have one criminal and the swag.

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"Then, working from there, pick up the man that the swag's to be dropped to, if that's the scheme in this case, have other men waiting to grab Levin and your Fancy Nan Barrett, and Schrader. I've got a man on Schrader now. He's a keen egg, this press agent, advance man or whatever he's called, but we have nothing definite on him.

"He simply circulates all around town, as I suppose his business is to do, gets acquainted with all the town officials, newspapermen, and so forth, and in general prepares the field. He also, of course, has an opportunity to figure out any chances for crooked work, but of course you can't arrest a man for what he's thinking. However, we'll grab him when the blow-off comes and he'll come clean, I'm sure."

They talked for hours, perfecting details and going over and over the ground. It was obligatory on them to proceed carefully because the skilful distribution of the loot and the details of operation indicated plainly a well-organized band which of necessity included several men, aside from those they knew.

As matters stood, Service pointed out, arrests would fall far short of real effectiveness. Iron-clad proof of any kind was lacking. How could they prove beyond the peradventure of a doubt that Levin and Stanton were behind those crimes?

The loot was missing, the men who had been spirited away were free and unknown, and practically all they had to go on was a deductive structure which, if it resulted in any conviction, would leave many criminals free and fall far short of proving the full responsibility of the gang.

"The man you had two fights with is now your aide, and the girl that was so helpful was double-crossing you," Service commented with a grin. "The female is more deadly than the male, George."

"Say something original," grunted Groody.

## IX

WHAT Groody called the ultimate uproar came three days later. Previous thereto, however, he was privileged to witness various matters which gave Service and himself a line to work on which later proved valuable.

The carnival arrived at noon on Sunday, and once again he watched the efficiency with which Levin's organization went about their work. Mindful of Manson's words a few days before, he watched the privilege car closely. At three o'clock in the afternoon he saw several men and some girls start to drift into the car, and an hour later he started for that destination himself.

He entered the car, from which sounds of hilarity had come to his ears, and then hesitated.

"Beg pardon," he said. "I didn't mean to——"

"Come right in!" chuckled Framer, the Fair Secretary, and Stanton seconded the invitation.

Stanton introduced Groody to three men and two girls. The other two women were the soubrette and principal dancer, respectively, of the "Hula Girls." Stanton was careful to expatiate on just who Groody was, and Framer, whose face was now very red and whose eyes sparkled feverishly, was an able second.

The men were introduced as the Chief of Police of Valley, a man named Devlin, who later proved to be political boss of the town, and a member of the city council. Groody accepted a drink of excellent whisky, and withdrew as quickly as possible from any prominent part in the conversation.

"Just talking over business," Stanton had told him, but Groody came to the conclusion that business had been dispatched before he arrived. The party grew more and more hilarious, although in a subdued manner. The car had been prepared, evidently, for the occasion, for it was unusually clean, there was a rug on the floor of the square at the lower end of the bar, and extra chairs. Bill, the barkeeper, dispensed drinks rapidly and without interest, and read a newspaper during his free moments.

The girls, all of them good-looking in an obvious, hard way, had each attached herself to a man and then proceeded to entertain him. Apparently each pair found themselves kindred spirits. It was a sordid sight, and the object of it was not far to seek.

Groody, drinking little and keeping his eyes wide open, was to be shown still another refinement. He noticed that Stanton's efforts were devoted entirely to keeping things going, and that while he drank considerably he did not show the effects at all. He seemed unusually sinister and calculating as he sat back and calmly watched.

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Groody was sitting facing the door at the lower end, and Bill, the barkeeper, was directly in his line of vision. Without any obvious signal, unless it was the rap of Stanton's cane on the floor, the spirits of the girls soared to such heights that one by one they felt impelled to give their companions some manifestations of affection. Two threw their arms around the necks of the councilman and Framer, the chief of police, found a young lady on his lap, and the other fair official found a girl leaning over the back of his chair in an intimate attitude.

It was a very jolly, companionable crowd, this! And Groody, his sardonic face a picture of half-mocking, wholly amused surprize, saw Bill swiftly pick up a large camera from beneath the bar, aim it for a second, and then snap the shutter.

Shortly afterward Groody left.

"Blackmail de luxe!" he grinned. "Not a one of those bozos know it, either. These birds have been flashed by Schrader as chaps who love the fleshpots, and as all right from the carnival point of view. Stanton'll fix everything with 'em, but if they get gay trying to tighten up—presto! That picture!"

Evidently the officials did not get gay, for Monday night Groody saw the Levin-Willet shows really at work, and the mob on the loose. Valley was the center of a great coal-mining district, and in addition the people from all over the country seemed to be turning out for the great event of the year.

Spielers, shills, lecturers, the band; all were working at top speed. The midway was a black mass of slow-moving people. The low roar of a happy crowd was split by the passionate appeals and descriptions of the spielers, and overlying that was the blare of brass and the endless screaming of the carousal calliope. Nearly all wheels were working for money now, and the law which says that every player must get some prize was violated without exception.

The "mob" worked beautifully. Groody, familiar by now with most of the operators, watched with interest. Five or six of them, working according to some hidden system of signals, would drift into the crowd and surround the victim, crushing against him from all sides. In a second his pocket was picked, the wallet passed back, and the "dip" himself free from the chance of conviction, even if he had bungled his work.

Groody went over and took a look at Lightning Melvin, owner and ticket-seller of the freak exhibit, which was housed in a row of shielded pits holding the wild man, the bearded woman, snake charmer, and other artists. Melvin had a strong ballyhoo of two spielers, and three or four men who were laborers around the show were now engaged in hustling the crowd in. Melvin, short-change artist of wide fame, was cleaning up. He worked so fast, talked so continuously and genially to every customer, that he was getting rich by the handful, as Groody commented to himself. The psychology of the whole thing was such as to induce the crowd to hurry their efforts to get in, giving Lightning a good opportunity to show his class.

Back in the privilege car two poker games and a crap game were in session, with Al Sibley, Mask Hallon and Benny Wolfe in charge, and new victims showing up every minute. Carnival employees were mixing in the crowd, shunting victims to the car, where moonshine at fifty cents a drink and gambling at a higher rate made the proceeds mount.

The badge girls were still cashing in, and had been ever since early afternoon. They pinned an ornate badge bearing the words "Guest of Honor" on the coat lapel of every unattached man, collected ten cents therefor, and if he showed a sizable roll were not unwilling to make a date for later in the evening.

Some vague charity was presumably the excuse for this, and the girls worked all through the grounds, their connection with the carnival not apparent. The Fair Committee, ignorant or not of the graft as the case might be, got a cent a badge as their percentage, the badges themselves cost possibly two cents, and the remaining seven was split between the girls and the carnival.

Groody's own business had flourished during the day. His share had been nearly forty dollars. And Stanton, who was in the office when the flyer checked in with Grady, the treasurer, had followed him out and said:

"Tomorrow, in the late afternoon, you fly over Chidborough and Grove's Hill, and finally land at Mercer. I'll be with you. We take off in the morning at dawn—and your rake-off will be two hundred. Is that all right?"

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"Suits me to a T," Groody answered, and grinned into the flabby, expressionless face with real pleasure.

"Have the ship all ready, then," said Stanton with that silky huskiness.

"There'll be no doubt of that!" Groody told himself as he walked away.

That night he slipped up town and told Service.

"I'll be there myself, with another man—Clancy. An operative'll be in tomorrow from Charleston, and he'll handle Levin and Barrett. We're lucky that Stanton himself is going."

"Uh-huh! May be a cleanup."

"You know, George, I've been thinking of the possibilities of what these boys have started. The time's coming when a secret service of the air, so to speak, will be a common thing. Look at the chances now! The whole air is free, unknown. Tremendous speed, secrecy, boundary lines·nothing—some day somebody is going to use that in a big way!"

Service's eyes were alight as he thought of the possibilities of the future, and Groody, the veteran of the air, lapsed into short meditation. Despite the fact that he was somewhat "fed up," as he expressed it, there would always remain the pride of having been somewhat of a pioneer; that he had contributed his tiny share to the conquest of the air.

His mind looked ahead a few years to the time when huge, stately craft would sweep the sky, and a proportion of the business of the world go on in the limitless heavens. Little by little the joy of diving and zooming and twisting a light little craft that was like a part of one's self would be forgotten as the romance of the air was submerged in monotonous, safe, featureless practicality. And with the love for his job that will always remain deep in the heart of every man who has ever known the thrill that comes from being alone in the sky, master of a craft that to all practical purposes knows no limitation of dimension or speed, he was saddened at the inevitable.

"Well, as the leading aerial detective of the Secret Service, I suggest we make sure of every move in Mercer," he said finally, coming out of his momentary trance. "I bow to your massive intellect, wide experience, and known love of talking, and give you first say."

## X

THE sun had dropped behind the towering hills next afternoon as Groody spiraled slowly down over the field at Mercer. The carnival had played there several weeks before, and Stanton had described the location to him. Alongside the level pasture a number of cars were drawn up.

They had flown over Chidborough and Grove's Hill, and Stanton had dropped the customary leaflets. The two towns were near Valley, Mercer itself close to seventy miles from the present stand of the Levin-Willet Shows. Stanton had told him, just before they left, that he was planning to stay with a friend in Mercer, but that Groody himself would stay at the hotel and that he was to be prepared to start home at dawn.

Groody wasted little time in looking the field over—it was getting dark rapidly and according to Stanton's description had been proven a good landing-place without obstacles of any kind. The pilot skimmed in over the rail fence, landed, and taxied close to the road, where several interested people were watching.

A thin little man wearing eyeglasses came up to the ship and greeted Stanton cordially. Groody ran out the motor, and then climbed out and assisted Stanton, whom he was forced to lift out bodily. Stanton leaned on him heavily until Groody had secured the cane and handed it to him.

"Mr. Granger, meet Lieutenant Groody," Stanton introduced them.

"Glad to know you, sir," said the little man, who seemed to be of middle age, and was possessed of a pair of alert brown eyes. "You certainly travel by twentieth-century methods, don't you Stanton?"

"Saves time, and I have very little. The fair at Valley is so big it's making us all stay close to the job."

Granger, whose car was waiting, walked over to it, Stanton limping by his side. Groody, with the eager assistance of two young men, staked down the ship. Stanton had told him that it would be unnecessary to guard it.

Groody warned the onlookers that any tampering with it would be dangerous, and then unwired the suitcases and carried them over to the car. He left the light coveralls which he had been wearing over his civilian clothes, although Stanton still wore his.

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Groody, at Granger's invitation, got in the car and they started for the city. Stanton removed his helmet and goggles, and put on the hat he had been carrying. Groody's own chapeau was in his suit-case, so he remained bareheaded.

They drew up in front of an ornate small-city hotel, and Stanton said—

"Mr. Granger has offered to get up early and drive us to the field, so we'll call for you at six o'clock."

He went in and registered, and with a casual eye found the name Francis Clancy on the page, with the room number of 303. His own room and bath was satisfactory, and was also on the third floor. As soon as he had washed up he went down to 303, knocked, and was invited to enter.

"Mr. Clancy?" he asked, surveying the chunky, pleasant-faced man who was playing solitaire in his shirt sleeves.

"I'm Groody," stated the pilot, and flashed the little gold badge Service had handed over to him in Valley. Groody had not worn one heretofore because of the chance that some one in the carnival might find it and give him away.

"Glad to know you," grinned the ruddy-faced Clancy, shaking hands. "You seem to be doing pretty well for an amateur. Well, what seems to be the lay? Service told me to come here, that the same ginks that's been pullin' those other jobs were in town, and that you'd give me the dope!"

"How much do you know?"

"Everything up to now."

"Well, Stanton's spending the night, he says, with a nervous little fellow named Granger that lives here. We may have all our trouble for nothing. But then again we may not. Let's find out who Granger is."

"There's a jewelry store run by a man named Granger—right next to the hotel here. I'll be back in five minutes."

The direct Mr. Clancy was as good as his word.

"Biggest jewelry store in the city, and the description of the owner fits yours."

"Then I'm convinced there will be something doing!" said Groody, in such a relieved tone that Clancy threw back his head and laughed a hearty Hibernian laugh.

"What's your advice? You're older at this game than I am," said Groody. "You know what Service and I suspect——"

"Uh-huh! I'll plank myself near the house and just watch," said Clancy. "As I understand it, the show-down comes in the morning if there's anything doing. Right?"

"Right. You'll just keep an eye on Stanton then, eh? I guess that's the only thing to do."

"Well, I'll start. You might walk around that way—clerk down here can probably tell you where Granger lives—and I'll tell you anything that comes up. If you and Service got this Stanton right, some visitors'll be comin'."

"Is Service here yet?"

"Nope—gets in at 10:22 tonight, he wired me. Well, I'll be stepping along. You'll be around that way after dinner?"

"Yes. I suppose the clerk can tell me where the house is. I'll find it, anyway."

"Have to ask directions myself. Well, see, you later," and the tranquil Clancy adjusted his natty straw hat and went out.

The clerk, it proved, knew exactly where Mr. Granger lived, and Groody started immediately after dinner. He noticed that the Granger store was closed for the day. By the illumination of one safety light that was burning he saw that it was a pretentious establishment.

The quiet residential street where Mr. Granger lived was a half-mile from the center of town—a small brick house set well back from the street and separated from its neighbors by several trees and perhaps fifty yards of lawn on each side. He kept a sharp lookout for Clancy as he strolled down the street. He finally spied him in a small drug store on a corner diagonally across from the Granger residence.

"Man went in the house about three minutes ago," Clancy told him tersely. "Found out that Granger's a bachelor and had one old nigger to look after him most of the time. There's that fellow now—and he's carrying a package!"

Without speaking they watched a short man come out of the house, walk unhurriedly down the walk to the street, and then turn toward the center of town.

"Let's get him," said Clancy, taking the words out of Groody's mouth.

They talked in low tones as they rapidly overtook him. They could see their quarry walking, without haste, through the dim splashes of light from the street lamps. If, as they suspected, a robbery was scheduled to take place that night, it might be at

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Granger's house. In that case, the man ahead might be a confederate, and that package might be interesting.

They were walking on the opposite side of the street, and after passing the man with the package they crossed over. The corner house had a considerable lawn, surrounded by a high hedge.

"We can wait here," said Clancy.

The man they were following would naturally think they had gone on down the side street. They waited quietly, invisible to him behind the barrier of shrubbery. The laugh of some children at play, farther up the street, and the foot-falls of the approaching man were all that broke the silence. It was only a few minutes after seven o'clock, and there seemed to be nobody abroad as yet, although several porches were occupied.

They stepped out from behind the hedge as the man reached the corner.

"Throw up your hands!" commanded Clancy in conversational tones, and his gun prodded into their captive's ribs. Groody's was also ready.

"Quick!"

"Groody's sharp command caused the utterly dumfounded victim to drop the package and thrust his hands upward.

The flyer rapidly searched him and removed a revolver from a rear pocket. He picked up the package.

"Now take your hands down and walk down this street with us," he commanded, and showed his badge. "Secret service," he added.

"What's in that package?" demanded Clancy as they walked slowly down the side street. Apparently the quick hold-up had attracted no attention, for the guns had been well-hidden and the man's hands had been in the air only a moment.

"Some clothes," stammered the ferret-like little captive, his eyes darting from side to side as he licked dry lips. "What the —— d'yuh think yuh're doin'?" he flamed suddenly in belated bravery.

"Shut up!" snapped Clancy, stopping his quarry in the shadow of a house. "Now we'll see what's in there."

Groody untied the package. There was a suit of dark material, heavy shoes, a black felt hat, and a black tin box which he opened.

"An actor's make-up box!" he grunted contentedly. "Now what's this? It's made of rubber——"

He shook out a sizable rubber affair and examined it.

"It can be blown up!" he said surprizedly. "And here's the bicycle pump——"

"That's how Stanton turns into a big stout man with a scar on his chin!" grinned Clancy. "See? Puts this on and blows it up to make him look big and stout, straightens out of the slouch, puts on that wig, forgets that crippled foot——"

"The man with the scar," nodded Groody. "And here's the wig, and here's a bag."

He poured the contents out in his hand. The little cloth sack gave up a flashing, sparkling flow of jewels.

"Clancy, the deed's been done!"

"Got 'em!" grunted Clancy. "Those sparklers are worth something, or I ain't been catchin' jewel-thiefs for twenty years. What were you going to do with this package? Speak up!"

He dug the cowering thief in the ribs with his gun as he spoke, to register emphasis.

"We're getting Stanton and the whole crowd," Groody told him. "You're hooked, so you might as well come clean and get off as easy as you can."

As the man hesitated Clancy thrust his face close to him and snarled suddenly—

"You talk, or by ——"

The crook decided that discretion was the better part of valor. These agents must have had detailed knowledge of the plot, or they would never have been on the job and apprehended him.

"I was to hide them things—" pointing to the bag of jewels—"in the ship——"

"Where?" interrupted the flyer.

"Underneath the cushion o' the back seat. Then I was to express the rest o' the stuff tuh Barclay——"

"Who?"

"Barclay—Stanton, I mean, at the carnival," stammered the crook.

"I see. Very neat," commented Clancy.

"Listen," said Groody. "You go back to the house. I'll land this bird in the jug and come back. You understand—don't warn Stanton of anything, see? I don't know yet where we go tomorow morning, and he'll undoubtedly plan to drop off these things as they've done before, and we want to land whoever's waiting."

They discussed the matter for a moment, Clancy still holding his gun against the captive's side. A few people passing by the

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corner did not show any sign of curiosity. The three seemed to be simply having a casual chat on the street.

Groody re-wrapped the bundle.

"All O. K.—let's go," he said. "And don't wax merry, young man, because my gun's in my coat pocket and my hand's right on it."

Clancy made off for Granger's residence with rapid strides, while Groody and his companion started more leisurely for the center of town in search of a policeman. The man said his name was Fallon, and maintained that he knew nothing of what was in the bundle. Under Groody's merciless questioning, however, the cringing crook told what, he maintained, was all he knew.

There were ten men in all, he said, and they made their headquarters in different cities. One at a time would be called on for certain service. All were experienced criminals in various lines. He, for instance, had been told to come to Mercer, call at Granger's house at seven o'clock, and get the package. As soon as he had cached the jewels and expressed the package his work was done.

He knew nothing of how the robbery had been planned, or the exact identity of the man who was to receive the loot by airplane, or indeed where it was disposed of. They all received a certain set price for each job from Stanton. Stanton's right name, it appeared, was Barclay, and Fallon knew little of his history. He had been inducted into the gang through a friend of his. He refused to give the identity of the other members of the gang, whom he knew, however.

"You'll get over that," remarked Groody. "Unless you want to serve a few years more than you have to. Hello, here's a cop now."

The burly policeman, who was standing on a corner twiddling his stick idly, nearly fell over backwards when he got a glimpse of Groody's badge.

"Take charge of this bird and put him in the jug. Charge him with carrying a concealed weapon, for the night. Here's the gun I took from him. Take this package, and guard it as you would your life. Keep your mouth shut about everything, understand? We're after big game, and everybody'll know all about it by tomorrow.

The guardian of the law did not fully comprehend his instructions, but finally Groody succeeded in making them clear.

"Very well, sor!" the officer said respectfully. "You'll find your mon and your package, sor. Come on, you!"

Groody made his way back to the house and rang the doorbell. He was armed with an excuse for his presence, if one was necessary, but it was not. A curious, rapidly growing group outside the gate prepared him for the policeman who loomed on the lawn, to guard the crowd, and for another who opened the door. Both men passed him instantly. Clancy had apparently prepared them.

He found Clancy, a captain of police, Granger, Stanton, and an old negro in the library. It was a cozy room, furnished in excellent taste, and hundreds of books lined it on two sides nearly to the ceiling.

"I just heard about the robbery, and thought I'd see if there was anything I could do," Groody said in answer to Stanton's inquiring gaze. "What happened?"

"Who's this?" demanded Clancy truculently, motioning toward Groody.

Groody grinned at the man's quick wit.

"He's one of my employees—flew the plane over here," said Stanton gently. "A very audacious crime, Mr. Groody."

"I want to question Mr. Granger alone," stated Clancy. "Does that suit you, chief? Of course, I wasn't meaning that you wouldn't be here——"

"Just the idea I had myself," returned the black-mustached captain.

Groody and Stanton and the old darky went out.

"What happened?" demanded Groody.

Stanton limped to a chair and sat down wearily.

"My friend Granger brought some valuable jewels here to show me. I have a weakness for them, and they are not a bad investment," he said. "While I was upstairs bathing and shaving, a man described as being a big, stout man with a mask on his face and a scar on his chin came into the kitchen, without warning, and knocked the old darky out with the butt of a revolver before he could do or say anything. Then he bound and gagged him. The robber did the same thing with Mr. Granger—knocked him out, bound and gagged him, and then made off with ten thousand dollars worth of jewels. I found them tied

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up when I came down-stairs, and notified the police."

Groody grinned significantly into Stanton's expressionless eyes.

"Clever work," he opined, with the suspicion of a wink. "I suppose the warning's out all over town to nab a big man with a scar on his face."

"I presume so," returned Stanton.

"Mr. Groody! Step in please. We wish to question you," barked the police captain. "Thank you, Mr, Granger."

Groody shot a reassuring smile at Stanton, and went in, passing Granger, who looked suddenly better. The door of the library closed behind him, and he was met by a duo of wide grins.

"Got the lay?" demanded Clancy.

"Part of it—tell me the rest."

"Just as I got here the police were arriving, notified by Stanton. I got hold of them, told 'em who I was before we went in, and posed as a detective for the city. I put the cap' here and the other cops wise to the whole lay, and Stanton ain't got the least idea his friend is captured, or that his little game is up.

"Wasn't it pretty though? Stanton goes up to dress, puts on the pneumatic suit of his while the water's running in the bathtub, mind you, and then comes downstairs all togged out, knocks out the two birds, gets the jewels, slips the whole bunch in a package and gets rid of it after he has become Stanton again, and then notifies the police. He must be an artist on make-up."

"Does Granger know all about it?" asked Groody.

"Yeah, he's in too," the captain vouchsafed. "Everybody knows but Stanton!"

"How did Stanton come to be here?" asked Groody.

"He and Granger got acquainted when this carnival was here. Granger liked him—said he knew all about books and that stuff. Then Stanton writes him and says he wants to buy some diamonds and would like to give Granger the business. Then this party was framed up—Stanton to come over and Granger was to submit these jewels to him. Stanton said he was so busy it'd have to be a quick trip, and so forth, and so it came about that the business was to be done here at the house. In fact, Granger says he half-believes the first suggestion of havin' Stanton look 'em over here came from him.

"The boy's clever, all right," the operative went on admiringly. "Granger wouldn't believe the big duke that came in here and socked him was Stanton until I'd told him all we know. That pneumatic suit, a change of clothes, big shoes, a good wig, even that made-up scar on his face—it's a knockout, ain't it?"

"In all of these jobs he pulled he must have had some quiet place spotted to put on his clothes. Probably wore that pneumatic outfit and his big clothes right over his ordinary haberdashery. Didn't you say he'd been an actor, Groody? I thought so. It wouldn't be a minute's work for an experienced man to shove his arms and legs through that suit, slap on breeches and coat and vest with a false shirt and collar like actors use often, and put on that wig. Could do it in a car or in some little outhouse. Maybe he done it sometimes down to the carnival and slipped out and then back. Planning like these boys did, they'd o' had the time and the place for the quick switch all set. "Ain't it a knockout?"

"It prob'ly would of knocked the police of this town sky-high," admitted the captain.

"We got it all set for tomorrow," Clancy went on. "Granger won't let on he knows anything, and'll drive you and Stanton out as per schedule. I also got it fixed for Service to go out as a friend o' Granger's that wants to take a look at the take-off. Then, as soon as you find out whether Stanton's going to drop this boodle to some other egg in some funny town—by the way, ain't that a bear of a frameup to shuffle swag till it can't be found—you can nab Stanton and you and Service go after the other bozo all sweet and pretty. I'll be hangin' around to take charge of Stanton when you get through with him. Where's the jewels?"

"Right here," said Groody. "I'll put something in the bag and stick it in the ship under the cushion so that Stanton'll think the stuff is there."

Clancy counted the flashing gems quickly.

"Fourteen—right. Well, cap', you'll have an inconspicuous cop over across the street somewhere, I suppose, to see Stanton don't take any funny notions?"

The captain nodded.

"Well, we'll mosey then. We got to meet Service."

They came out into the hall, and then

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went into the dining room, where pert little Granger was talking with Stanton. The criminal was certainly an actor, reflected Groody, looking with new wonder at the stooped, bald man before him.

His suspicions about that foot had been the starting point of the deductions which were now coming to a climax. Then the fact that Stanton had mentioned being an actor, and that so many times the famous man with a scar had simply disappeared had turned his mind, and Service's also, to complete disguise as the only solution.

Groody had really never been at all certain that his wild idea was anywhere near correct, for it seemed too much of a change from a thin, stooped cripple to a big, stout, scarred man with normal use of his legs. Service's clock-like mind, after Groody's story, had reached the conclusion that Stanton and the man with the scar might be one and the same, and that had fortified Groody in his hypothesis.

Stanton looked at him questioningly, and Groody smiled his reassurance.

"Well, we're leavin'," Clancy announced. "I'm sure we'll get our man, Mr. Granger. By this time he won't have a chance to get twenty miles without being caught. We can't do any more here. 'Night, everybody."

The captain went out with Clancy, and Groody tarried behind. He heard the story of the robbery again from Granger, commiserated with him on his loss, assured him that there was no chance, undoubtedly, for the criminal to escape, and then made his adieux, satisfied that Stanton was without suspicion that anything was amiss with his plans.

## XI

PROMPTLY at six o'clock Mr. Granger and Stanton drew up in front of the hotel. Groody emerged, followed a moment later by Service. Granger, well-coached in his rôle, performed the introductions, and Service and Groody shook hands like strangers.

Out at the field Groody, assisted by Service, who had volunteered, pulled out the stakes and untied the ropes. Stanton limped over beside the rear cockpit, and the closely watching agents saw him feel of the cushion. Groody had planted the bag of supposed jewels late the night before, so he knew that Stanton's groping hand would find what it sought.

Before wiring the suit-cases on the ship Groody came up to Stanton and asked in a low tone—

"Where to, Mr. Stanton?"

"Coalville. Field one mile due east of town, bounded on north and south by dirt roads. An automobile will be parked on the northern road. If it faces west, fly low and give me a chance to drop a package to a man who will be waiting. If it faces east, do not fly low but fool around over town for a while until the signal comes that everything is clear."

Groody put his hand in his pocket carelessly. Service, wrapping the stakes in a bundle, was about twenty feet away.

"Now throw up your hands, Mr. Stanton!" snapped Groody, and a Colt appeared in his hands with the effect of magic.

Service straightened, and another gun was pointed at the luckless Stanton.

The man leaned heavily on his cane, and said quietly, wearily—

"Just what does this mean, Groody?"

"It means that Mr. Service and I are secret service agents, that I was planted with your carnival to try to solve some mysterious crimes, and that we know you stole those jewels last night, how you have been in the habit of disguising yourself, have captured your confederate who took jewels and disguise away from the house, and have the loot, in addition to a confession from him."

Stanton said nothing. His opaque eyes rested steadily on Groody's face, and then turned slightly to include the tense Granger, who was now standing close by. A Ford drove up, and Clancy climbed out.

"I see," said Stanton at length. "Can I take my hands down?"

"Just a minute," said Service, and rapidly searched him. Stanton was unarmed.

Slowly the man threw away his stick, and straightened up. His crippled foot disappeared, as did the stoop.

"Well, business as usual," said Clancy briskly. "Ready for me to take 'im away?"

"All ready," nodded Service. "We'll be back in a couple of hours."

Stanton walked slowly to the Ford, carrying his suit-case, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and saying nothing. In a moment he was on his way back to town in custody of the ubiquitous Clancy.

Granger talked ebulliently and admiringly as Groody wired his own suit-case on



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the right wing, snug up against the fuselage. Groody instructed Service how to put on the switch and jazz the throttle when he cranked the motor, and Tom installed himself in the cockpit. Groody, making sure that the wheel-blocks were tight against the tires, spun the propeller to draw gas into the cylinders and then yelled—

"Contact!"

He cranked, but the cold motor did not start. After five minutes of work that left the lanky pilot hot and perspiring the engine finally condescended to start, and Groody leaped like a kangaroo for the side of the ship to jockey it along with throttle and spark. In a moment it was idling smoothly, and Service got out. He put on the helmet and goggles which had been the apparel of Stanton, and Groody likewise adjusted his own.

After a five-minute warm-up the thermometer was nearly seventy, and Groody decided they could start. Oil and air were reading correctly, and the motor, during its momentary opportunity to run wide open, ran without a hitch and the r. p. m. was satisfactory—fifteen hundred. Groody kicked out the wheel-blocks, assured the bubbling, excited Granger that they would be back in a little while, and then strapped himself in. Service nodded that he was ready, and in a moment the ship taxied up for the take-off.

They were off the ground half-way down the field, and in slow, ever-widening circles Groody kept within gliding distance of his landing field while he got his altitude. They were circling in a valley, below the tops of mountains which seemed to hem them in on every side save for the gorge cut by the river. As a matter of fact, the flat land on which Valley was set was four miles wide, but in a ship traveling over a mile a minute the distance seemed small.

At two thousand feet, with motor throttled to fourteen hundred and fifty revolutions a minute, Groody strained his eyes through the thick ground mist and picked up the railroad which his map showed him would lead him into Coalville. It led along the side of the river for a while, so he banked and straightened for his course.

It was chilly yet, and below, the valleys seemed filled with solid mother-of-pearl. Fringes of mist floated around the mountains, even toward their hoary crests, deepening into opaque fog in the valleys. The rays of the sun flashed from the metal of the ship, but the earth below was still in shadow.

Mile after mile reeled behind them, Groody keeping careful track of the towns they passed to make doubly sure he would know Coalville when he saw it. It was marked by the conjunction of two railroads, but he wanted to make assurance doubly sure by having a check, so his gaze alternated constantly between map and ground as he followed the thin steel thread that wound among the mountains.

He had expected more trouble with Stanton, he reflected. The man had apparently realized that his game was up and that he had no chance to escape, but oftentimes desperation makes a man forget the odds. It must have been a stunning surprize to him to find that he was caught, for the ingenuity of his disguise was really remarkable. The pneumatic suit was divided into compartments, with opening for head, legs and arms. By pumping these various compartments up to varying degrees, the illusion of a big, somewhat obese torso could be made perfect.

Different clothes, even to the big shoes, an expensive wig, and artistic make-up completed a disguise that, as Granger's original disbelief had proven, was practically impenetrable. Add to that the fact that Stanton was even playing a part in pretending to be crippled and stooped, and it was no wonder that he had been able to disappear within fifteen minutes after a robbery. The audacity and psychological effectiveness of that scar made up on his chin was also admirable—or would have been in a better cause.

Forty-five minutes after leaving Valley, Coalville showed ahead. The town was on a small tributary stream, and, like Valley, was set in a small plain. Groody and Service both picked up the field quickly—and the car was headed west.

Groody wasted no time. He throttled the motor and nosed down in a steep dive that dropped them earthward with dizzying speed. He held his nose and blew out his ears repeatedly, turning and signaling Service to do likewise. The ship corkscrewed around the field in a tight spiral. They could now see a man standing in the field, well out from the fence. That, undoubtedly, was their prospective victim,

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and he would be an important captive, or he would not be trusted with the final disposal of the jewels.

Groody straightened out for his landing —which would undoubtedly surprize and probably warn the man below. Speedy work would be necessary to capture him if he had a premonition that all was not as it should be.

The pilot was relieved that the field was a possibility for a landing, although very small. It would have meant a deal of extra trouble to have landed in some other field and then pursued the car which was to have carried the gems. He stalled down across the fence with barely speed enough to stay in the air, and hit the ground hard as he landed.

He pushed on the throttle to taxi as quickly as possible toward the waiting man, who had now retreated a few steps toward the fence. He tried to keep the nose of his ship pointed toward him so that he would not be able to see that Stanton himself was not in the back seat.

He was unsuccessful, however. As they got within fifty yards of the man, that gentleman suddenly decided that safety first was his motto, and ran for his car. Service vaulted over the side of the cockpit, tugging for his gun. The sight of his chubby form, and the gun, decided the other man, who was alone in the car. In an instant he was off like a shot, and Service's bullets had no apparent effect.

Groody jumped out before the ship had stopped rolling.

"Find yourself a car and chase him. I'll fly over him to let you know where he is!" he said rapidly. "That road leads right up into the mountains, and I don't think there are any cross-roads!"

Service nodded, and started at a half-run for the road, which led directly into town. Groody got in the ship and taxied leisurely up the field for the take-off. There was no hurry as far as he was concerned.

He had a bad moment on the take-off, for trees on the far side of the road were high, and he had to bank between two of them. He missed them by perhaps ten feet as his Jenny curved through, twenty feet off the ground, but there was no harm done. To an expert eye at least five hundred hours of flying would have shown plainly in the way Groody accomplished it.

He straightened out the plane, and circled upward. At five hundred feet the speeding motor car could be seen plainly, as could Service. With the ship in a steep climb Groody watched the progress of matters below. Service had discarded his flying clothes, and was speeding for a main highway a quarter of a mile away. He was trotting along tirelessly, like a cross-country runner. At intervals cars passed along the pike, so there would probably be little delay after he reached his goal.

Groody headed toward the mountain for which the car was speeding. From his altitude, now fifteen hundred feet, the twisting ribbon of the road, curving around the mountainside, was discernible for many miles. He drove on ahead of the car, watching for crossroads. Finally, as the car was climbing up the side of the mountain, taking hair-pin curves at dizzy speed, the ship roared over the crest and the car was lost to sight.

The flyer was still scrutinizing the ground closely for crossroads, but as he got further on he could see that there were absolutely none, and no immediate possibility of any.

On one side of the road there was an almost sheer drop of fully eight hundred feet to a thickly wooded ravine which separated two mountains. On the other side of the road the slope was steep and heavily wooded. The plain surrounding the town was out of sight now, and the ship was flying over wild and desolate country. It seemed incongruous to think of smiling fields and a small city ten miles away through the pass.

Groody banked around, and straightened to go back and see whether the pursuit had started. As he did so, the motor simply stopped. No preliminary sputter, no warning of any kind whatsoever. With a suddenness like a physical shock Groody found himself floating above the untamed wilderness in a great silence.

Rarely, if ever, had such bitterly self-condemnatory phrases ever passed his lips. In an instant his fast-working brain found the solution, and it was not a flattering one. The ship had simply run out of gas, due to his own lack of forethought.

"—— of a flyer I am," he rasped viciously. "Thought it'd run on its reputation!"

For a moment he forgot the desperation of his plight in his searing self-contempt, but he came to himself with a snap. His

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eyes swept the forest below, noting the jagged, outcropping cliffs and towering trees. There was not a ten-feet-square clearing in all that rolling panorama.

"Mush into the trees and take my medicine," he thought, with a curious tingle running up and down his spine.

Lower and lower the ship swept in a wide spiral while he tried to find a place that looked as he might land and still keep his neck intact. He was resigned to a broken leg, perhaps——

Then he saw a chance to gamble. It meant either absolute safety or almost certain serious injury.

There was a straight stretch of road, a hundred yards long, and on one side of it, where the mountain swept down to it, there was a space a few feet wide, apparently hollowed out to let cars pass. On the other side of the road the ravine dropped sheer from the very edge. Could he land on that road, hold the ship on it for a few seconds while it lost speed, and then smash it into the mountain-side? If it tumbled off into the ravine, it would drop five hundred feet out of control, and to escape badly mangled instead of dead would be almost a miracle.

Without hesitation he took the chance. The next few seconds were of the sort that all flyers know and most of them love—after they are over. Even as he swept around and jockeyed for position there was a sort of fierce joy in the thrill of what was coming.

With no motor to help him, absolute judgment of speed, angle of glide, and distance were necessary. There was a sharp curve in the road before it straightened into that stretch, and Groody brought the Jenny down over it at seventy miles an hour. He could not make a stall landing, for after he hit the road he must have plenty of speed to make the rudder work and thus handle his ship on the ground.

He hit squarely in the middle of the road, skimming along on two wheels. To his left the wing-tip barely escaped the hill-side. To his right he could look almost straight down into the chasm. There was not a foot of leeway between his outside wheel and the yawning gulf.

Like a speeding locomotive the ship skimmed the highway. With the matchless skill that was his he worked the rudder with a delicacy and fineness that resulted in almost absolute accuracy. Not three inches to right or left—until the curve loomed ahead.

The tail-skid was down now, and the speed somewhat reduced. With all his strength Groody jammed on his left rudder and swept the stick to the right. Both tires burst with a loud report and the ship swerved to the left. With up-flung hand to protect his face he waited the split-second that seemed like an eternity. Then came a rending crash as left wings crumpled and the nose smashed into the hillside.

The ship telescoped a trifle—the motor was knocked back six inches. Groody climbed out, absolutely unhurt.

He wasted no time in self-congratulation.

"I wonder whether yon bozo saw the plane come down," he soliloquized. Immediately he decided that the chances were excellent that his impromptu landing was still a secret. The car was climbing up the other side of the mountain, and he might have landed without the fugitive's knowledge. It made but little difference—the man was hemmed in ahead and behind now, for the wreck of the ship was squarely in the narrow road.

Groody hid himself behind a tree at the lower turn in the road, and waited as patiently as he could. Twenty minutes passed without any action. He began to think that the man had seen him and had possibly deserted his car to plunge into the woods on foot when the noise of a fast-firing motor came to his ears.

Gun in hand, he waited. In a moment a big touring car swayed around the turn. The stout, well-dressed man who had been waiting at the field was behind the wheel.

Groody could hear a startled oath as the car skidded to a stop. Then, taking careful aim, he fired at a tire in order to make assurance doubly sure. The man might attempt to drive through the crumpled fuselage—the motor itself was next to the bank.

The tire burst with satisfying gusto.

The fleeing crook gave one terrified glance at the hill-side, and saw Groody emerging from his retreat.

"Hands up——"

Like a flash the man was out of the car and had disappeared over the edge of the ravine. In kangaroo-like bounds the flyer was after him. The fugitive was half-rolling down the almost sheer slope.

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"Out of control!" grinned Groody, and without hesitation launched himself over the rim of the chasm.

The feat he actually performed amounted virtually to a thirty-foot leap. His body scarcely touched the pebbly embankment on the way down. His feet dug into the earth ten feet above the floundering man ahead, but Groody's momentum was scarcely lessened. In a half-slide that ripped his clothing to shreads and scratched him cruelly he catapulted down on his prey.

Locked in each others arms, kicking and clawing like beasts, they tore down the slope. Earth was in Groody's mouth and eyes, and he was scarcely conscious of where he was, but he hung on grimly. They smashed into a stump, and for a moment both ceased their efforts as the shock dazed them. Groody himself was groggy and breathless, and not until the other man started to fight loose did he fully regain his senses.

The struggle was brief but fierce, and when Groody finally found himself holding the other man down his face was a mass of scratches from which the blood flowed freely. His big captive drew in his breath in sobbing gasps. He, too, was an awesome sight.

Groody was surprized to find that the man had no gun. His clothing—what was left of it—was of excellent material and tailoring. He made no resistance as Groody took out a cardcase and some letters.

"Lionel B. Young and Co., Jewelers, Rothwell, Ohio," said Groody aloud, and for a moment was afraid that he might have an innocent man captive between his knees. Then he remembered the sudden flight, and felt secure again. For Rothwell was a city, and if this man was Lionel B. Young, as the letters indicated, he might be by way of being a prominent citizen.

"Get up, and let's climb out of here," Groody said, taking the gun from his pocket. Luckily it had not been lost in the scuffle.

The man staggered to his feet. He was rather impressive looking—his portly form surmounted by a broad, fleshy face and graying black hair. His mouth was full and sensual, and below it the chin was round and weak. Before his recent trip down the hill-side he had evidently been dressed immaculately and in excellent taste.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his breath still coming in gulps. He wiped off the blood with a silk handkerchief.

Groody uncovered his badge, and the man sank to the ground weakly.

"I knew it," he said hopelessly.

"Let's get up on the road," said Groody again, and his prisoner got to his feet obediently.

It was a tough struggle to climb back up the slope, but finally they made it. The captive sat down at the edge of the ravine, and his head sank into his hands.

"Are you Mr. Young?" asked Groody.

He had two cigars in his hand, and offered one to his companion, who refused with a shake of the head.

"Yes," he said wearily.

Groody digested this fact for a moment. The ramifications of Stanton's conspiracy were beginning to reach far and high, it seemed.

Suddenly Young turned to the flyer, and desperation flamed in his rather fine eyes.

"If I should jump down this slope again, would you shoot?" he demanded.

"Why?" countered the surprized pilot.

"Because I'd give anything in this world to be dead this minute!" rejoined Young in a low voice.

"I'm afraid I'd have to try to get you without shooting," stated Groody. "Are you in this thing very deep?"

For a moment the stricken jeweler did not answer, and then in a sudden burst of words the story tumbled out. It was approximately as Groody had suspected. Young, somewhat of a man-about-town and distinctly fond of the fleshpots, had been caught in a web spun by none other than Fancy Nan Barrett.

Then came the black-mailing threats, with the alternative of laying proofs of his indiscretion before his wife. The amount of money demanded was prohibitive, for he had always lived up to his income. Then Stanton had appeared with an alternative—that Young buy jewels from him, Stanton, at various times and dispose of them in new settings. This he could do with moderate safety, due to his established reputation. He had never been told, he said, that the jewels were stolen, but of course he had known it. This was the first time he had ever been called on actually to receive them—usually they had been delivered to him.

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"I've been —— weak, even vicious," Young concluded brokenly. "But I love my wife and——"

"Blackmail is a tough game," said Groody slowly. "And I doubt if there's one man in a thousand who hasn't some time or other exposed himself to it, so to speak. But buck up, Mr. Young. I failed to warn you that anything you said would be used against you, so whether I'm right about it or not I'll see what can be done. The fact that you never actually could prove that the jewels were stolen will help somewhat—it may be a scandal but there's nothing to commit suicide about."

He had Young feeling much better when Service roared up to them in a big red car. Service thanked the interested young man who had been his chauffeur, and then listened to the story. A half-hour later, with the help of drivers who were stopped by the airplane wreck, they cleared the road of wreckage and put a spare tire on Young's car, and then proceeded back to town.

"Looks like a good haul, taking it by and large," grinned Service as he settled back in the seat. He was in front with Groody, who was driving. The car was Young's.

"Fair," agreed Groody. "The last twenty hours have been full of surmizes and conclusions."

"And you won't have to be looking keenly around any more," chuckled Service. "After you get to town. For the love of Mike remember you're a detective, though, until you leave these curves behind you!"

## XII

THREE busy days later Groody and Service, in different stages of undress, were lounging in a hotel room in Valley, talking over the various ramifications of their recent swoop upon Stanton and his organization.

Every detail, practically speaking, was well in hand. Stanton and Levin and Fancy Nan Barrett had absolutely refused to talk, but Fallon had opened the floodgates and spouted interesting speech like Old Faithful. Schrader, the dapper advance man, had also gone into eruption, and between the two of them the identity of every member of the gang had been learned, and all but one apprehended.

The scheme was exactly as Service and Groody had figured it. Schrader, next to Stanton, was the big man of the organization, although it was a remarkable fact that no single member was in the complete confidence of the chief, except possibly Ann Barrett.

Schrader "smelt out" possibilities of crime. When he left a town he was thoroughly acquainted with every representative of the Government therein, and submitted a detailed report which showed the possibilities of the town from both a carnival and straight criminal viewpoint—whether or not any one would stand for a bribe, just how wide open the show might be able to run, and any particularly luscious criminal opportunities were included in his report. His share was a straight salary of two hundred dollars a week and expenses.

Blackmail had been responsible for the fact that the pay-roll robbery had been a surety due to the guards having useless guns. One guard had been forced to slip the blanks into the two guns, which he could do without suspicion. This was elicited from the guard who had been known to be friendly with Schrader when the agent who interviewed him bluffed him with what knowledge was already in the hands of the authorities.

After Schrader had outlined possibilities of a crime, another man was sent in—usually Fallon—to get more detailed information. Then Fallon would leave, and when the carnival came to town still another of the ten members of the gang would appear, "pull the job" with the disguised Stanton, and in ten more minutes be on his way by airplane with the loot.

In most cases the confederate both came and went by airplane. Stanton relied on his double-barreled disguise. Each man was paid a generous lump sum for his services. As things looked now to Groody and Service, the connection of Levin with the organization consisted merely in a knowledge of it, and a split on the proceeds. There was no proof of any actual physical participation in the crimes themselves by either him or Fancy Nan.

Traced by the name of Barclay, the man known as Stanton was found to have been a vaudeville actor whose specialty was character work and quick changes of costume. He had presented a playlet in which he took all the parts—known as a

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"protean act" in the parlance of the stage —and had dropped from sight over two years before.

By piecing together all the stories, the scheme had been laid bare down to the smallest detail. No one of the prisoners could have told it all, for each man seemed to be entirely ignorant of any phase but his own. Even Schrader, for instance, did not know how the loot was disposed of, nor did any of the others except a man named Wiggins, who had acted as messenger between airplane and Young.

Young had been used this time because of Wiggins' illness, and Stanton apparently did not wish to allow any further members of his organization to learn the secret. He had never, it appeared, allowed either jewels or currency to remain in his possession, obviously preferring to rely on the fact that his hench-men would not double-cross him as long as they had such safe and lucrative jobs.

The whole scheme had been framed with the idea of cutting all threads by which Government agents, after solving one robbery, might be led to a solution of them all. The use of different men for the crimes themselves, and for each step in the preparation of them, added to the fact that no one man knew more than was absolutely necessary, plainly showed that Stanton was taking every possible precaution in the event of capture.

It appeared that Young, Levin and Ann Barrett would escape with ligher punishment than the others, all of whom had criminal records save Schrader. Levin was at present free on a $20,000 bond in order to put his business affairs in shape.

As a matter of fact, the wide publicity given the wholesale arrests had resulted in a huge business boom for the carnival. The big attendance could not be used to the limit, however, for there had been a sudden change in the methods of the Levin-Willet shows. The privilege car was dreary and lifeless, and the grifters had disappeared to parts unknown. The merchandise games were running squarely, and the badge girls cry was no more heard on the lot.

"Well, George, I guess we're on a hard-earned vacation for a w-while," said Service finally, conversational material anent their recent experiences having run out. "And I'm tickled to death."

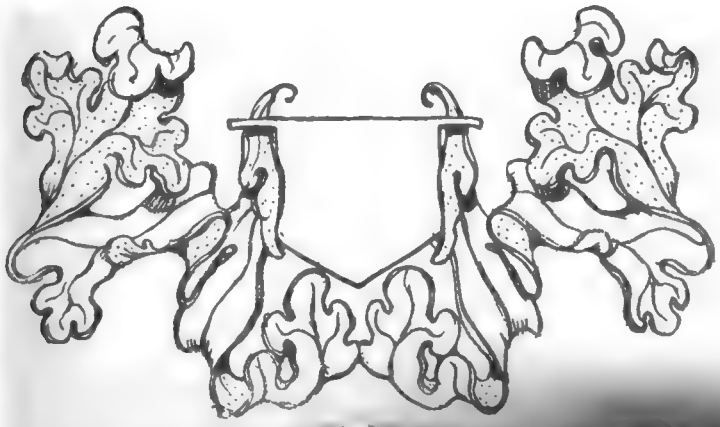
"How long before that resignation of yours'll be accepted?" queried Groody.

"Oh, a week or so, probably."

"And then we simmer down to the sea and start to go places?" demanded the sardonic flyer.

"Right."

"Good. Any more excitement I'm adjacent to must be located in foreign climes!"



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# Fading Light*

By J. D. NEWSOM

*Author of "The Rain-Maker," "The Khan's Gift," etc.*

LITTLETON left Keene's bungalow at eleven o'clock. There had been a volley of good-natured abuse from the other poker players when he arose from the table; they had begged him to stay, for he was popular, but he always knew when to stop. His brain was not quite clear, he felt a warning tightening of the muscles of his jaw, and his wide-open eyes would not focus properly. So he cashed in his chips and went out of the hot room, where tobacco smoke hung blue and heavy, into the open air. He walked quickly through the garden, carefully closed the gate behind him and swung along the empty road toward his house.

The island was hushed and still. To the right, half-seen between the grayish bolls of the coconut-trees, lay the sea, its unruffled waters mirroring the stars. To the left, their outlines softened and blurred, the dark hills of Santo towered up against the darker sky.

As he went Littleton identified each landmark to keep his mind from wandering as it occasionally did when he had had just enough of Keene's whisky. That building over there was Crellat's house. Beyond was the mission church, its Gothic door like a black maw in the luminous white-washed wall. Gothic in the New Hebrides! Littleton sneered at the thought, his fists clenched, and a queer thrill ran down his back.

No, no, no! He must not allow himself to feel like that. He began to count his steps to banish an overpowering desire to hurt something, to squeeze some frightened thing between his short, blunt fingers. Whenever he drank it was as if a red malicious devil fired his brain. Normally he was a quiet man, successful and well-liked, but when he was like this—

"One hundred and two, one hundred and three——"

That was Chen Long's store behind the banana-fronds. The half-blind old heathen! What was he doing now? Smoking opium, no doubt. He would be lying on a mat with a pipe between his puckered lips and those owl-like black goggles would be pushed back off his eyes. They would be narrow slits gleaming with pleasure.

Chen Long had no right to speak such good English. Why didn't he say "velly" instead of "very," "lice" instead of "rice?" Where had he picked up the language? The problem irritated Littleton. He paused undecided in the roadway. Should he go and ask Chen Long for an explanation? Should he force the truth out of the old

* *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page.*

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man? That would be fun. There were many ways of making a Chinaman talk.

He took a step toward the store.

"One hundred and four" automatically chanted his brain and again the evil within him was fettered in numerical shackles,

"I must go home," Littleton told himself between stiff lips. "Must go home. Chen Long might fight."

From afar down the road came the sharp, high yelp of a dog.

"That's Cynthia," he commented gravely. "My pup Cynthia. Good pup."

He smiled sourly. Cynthia always made a fuss over him. First to scratch on his door in the morning, she was last to stand at the foot of the stairs in the evening thumping out a mute good-night with her short tail. She loved him. Littleton cursed as he drew near to his house. He didn't want love. All day long he had to hold himself in check, to talk softly to fools and be friendly with men he would have shot gladly. Business demanded it. In a small community one had to be careful. His popularity meant lax supervision, minor offenses against labor laws and land valuations were overlooked.

But tonight he didn't want affection or friendliness. He had fled from Keene's when he felt his temper begin to give way, but in his own home he wouldn't be bothered, not even by a dog.

Ah! There was the gate and behind it, in the middle of the path, was that confounded pup yapping her head off.

Savagely he kicked her out of the way and when she yelped in sudden pain the smile, like a smear, spread across his face.

"Got you," he mumbled. "Serve you right—slavering all over me."

But she followed him as he went into the house and scratched at the wire netting on the door when he flung himself into a chair and yelled for his servant.

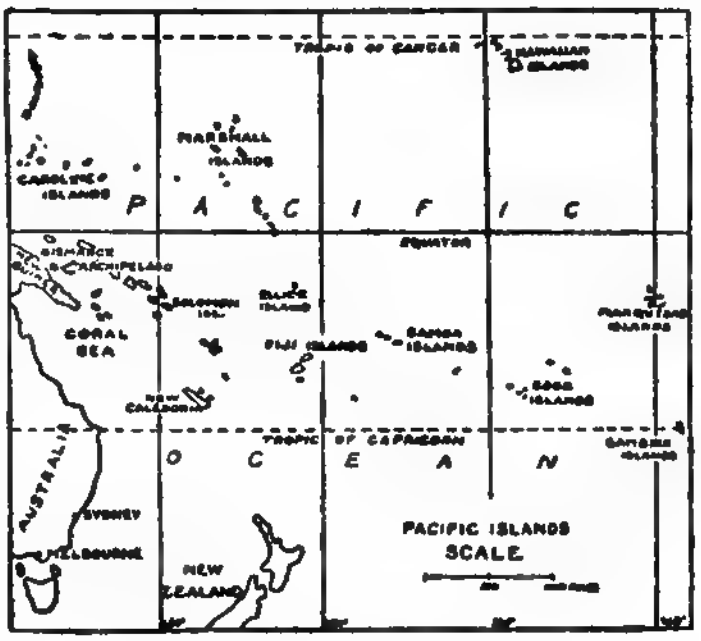
A black boy came sidling into the room, fear peeping out of his eyes. He had seen the devil in Littleton unleashed on other occasions and tonight all the signs were set at danger. His employer's face was livid except for two bright red spots high up on the cheek-bones and the whole countenance was set and immobile, dead, except for the eyes which smoldered and glowed.

"Fetch decanter and glass, quick." Littleton said huskily.

All things were ready and in half a minute they rested on the table at his elbow.

"Clear out," he ordered. "And don't come back. I don't want to see your dirty face again."

He lighted a cigar and threw it away after the first puff. Couldn't smoke. It tasted




THE NEW HEBRIDES ARE THE SMALL GROUP DIRECTLY NORTH OF NEW CALEDONIA.

rank. There was that dog again pawing at the netting. He could see her muzzle pressed up against the wire. She was whining, too.

"Stop it," he shouted as he flung a book at the door. But she came back again whimpering softly.

What could she want? He hated her, hated all animals tonight. He couldn't think with all that noise. She was squeaking and scratching like a rat. One killed rats. Why shouldn't he kill Cynthia? Perhaps, though, she'd stop if he let her come in.

He crossed the room and pulled the door open. She bounded in and, the kick forgotten, flung herself at his legs.

"Keep still," he said. "Lie down."

She refused to take heed and threw herself at his legs as he went back to his chair. He fell on hands and knees and looked at her malevolently. This was too much. The pup was circling about him just out of range, her tongue hanging out and a grin on her face.

"Come, Cynthia," he managed to say.

He found it difficult to speak.

His tongue was thick and dry.

"Come here, darn you," he repeated.

She came cringing slightly and he drew

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her toward the table. She worried his trouser legs and pulled at his laces while he selected a ball of thick twine from a drawer and wound it about her. This must be a new game. She struggled, snapped and growled until she found that this was no game and that the twine was biting hard into her legs and about her jaws. Then, however, it was too late to struggle.

Littleton lifted her on to the table and bound her carefully that she might not roll off.

"Teach you a lesson," he said in a whisper. "I want to hear you sing so we'll remove these."

He cut the strands binding her jaws and she barked angrily. She struggled, but the cords held her down.

"I'll change your tune," he went on. "Just wait a bit."

He picked out and lighted a fresh cigar and looked down at the squirming animal.

"Now," he said. "Sing!" and he pressed the glowing end of the cigar against the terrier's flank.

The angry bark changed to an almost human cry of pain—higher and higher—ending in a sudden gurgling whimper.

"Ah!" sighed Littleton.

His face, no longer impassive, was very red and twitched jerkily. A slight smell of burned hair and flesh pervaded the room.

"Not finished yet," he commented.

For ten minutes the terrier's agonized clamor rang out, gradually becoming lower and lower. Once Littleton laughed when he paused to light another cigar, only once—and the sound of it numbed his servant cowering on the veranda, ready to bolt if his master called to him.

But Littleton was wholly absorbed and nothing mattered in all the world but the thing on the table before him. When the door swung open he turned around slowly like a man in a dream. Chen Long, grave and placid, stood before him. Black goggles shielded his eyes, but his lined, yellow face betrayed no emotion. He bowed slightly as he came into the room, both his hands tucked up the sleeves of his jacket.

"I heard some one in pain," he said, "so I came——"

Littleton stood with his back to the table, masking the dog, but he could not drown its convulsive whine.

"Who asked you to come in?" he retorted, speaking slowly, with difficulty.

He was awed, however, by the staring black spectacles and went on to explain:

"It's only my pup. She's hurt."

"I can not see very well," Chen Long came a step closer, "but perhaps I might help."

"No." Littleton's voice was cold and hard. "I can attend to her myself. Don't need help."

The mists were clearing from his brain. He didn't want to be found out. He was shaken and frightened. He must bluff it out.

"Who gave you permission to walk in like this?" he went on wrathfully. "Will you kindly leave my house?"

"Listen," the old man was unmoved. "The dog still whines. I know a little about such matters. Though my sight is poor I might soothe it."

Littleton was fascinated by the steady, droning voice; his eyes were held by the black glasses. He could not move. Chen Long came closer to the table, bent down, peered at the writhing dog.

"*Tssss!*" The breath came sharply between his teeth. "So! I understand."

His voice was bell-like, ringing in the stillness as he faced Littleton.

"You have done this! You, a man, to a little dog!"

"What of it?"

Littleton came slowly around the table toward Chen Long.

"Stand where you are," the old man ordered. "Stand still. Would you injure me also? I, who can only see shadows."

"You came in uninvited. How do I know what you want?"

"I came to help, perhaps to relieve suffering. I find this!"

With a long forefinger Chen Long pointed to the dog. "I shall take the animal with me. You are not fit to keep it."

"Oh, no?" Littleton laughed nervously. "You are wrong. Now please leave my house at once. The dog's mine. I do what I like with it."

"You do not!" Again Chen Long's voice rang out.

Indifferent to the other man's menacing attitude he untied the cords binding the dog.

"Will you stop that?" Littleton was half-angry, half-astonished. "My kind

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Samaritan, I told you to get out. If you don't, you are going to find yourself in trouble."

"I have no fear," answered Chen Long, never looking up. "Who fears a coward?"

Littleton leaped forward screaming with rage.

"Ho!" breathed the old man. "It is my turn now."

He stood, swaying slightly, until Littleton's fist caught him on the shoulder, then his left hand shot out, seized the wrist while the fingers of his right hand ran up the arm to the elbow. His pressure tightened. Littleton gasped, cried out in sudden anguish:

"Stop, stop! You're hurting me!"

"Even as you hurt the dog," softly murmured Chen Long.

Littleton tried to wrench himself away, but the pressure increased. He tried to strike with his free hand, but a thousand rivulets of fire radiated from his elbow. He felt himself being lifted up, up and up. His brain swam sickeningly. He was sliding, pitching forward, hurtling through space. He crashed into something solid and unyielding. Darkness followed a sudden blinding light.

Dispassionately Chen Long surveyed his fallen antagonist, turned him over on his back with his foot and knelt by his side.

His hands deftly ran over Littleton's scalp. At last he grunted disgustedly and stood up.

"Beast," he said aloud. "Drunken beast. Tomorrow you will be well again and come begging for your dog."

He took the terrier in his arms and left the house, without noticing the black boy huddled in a corner of the veranda.

DAWN found him still at work in his stuffy little room dressing and soothing the tormented animal. He had worked by touch, using his eyes sparingly, and had applied the oil and wound the bandages with skilful hands.

A gray blurred light crept in at the open window, trees and bushes took shape, a parrot chattered in the foliage about the house, a gang of laborers talking in sleepy voices shuffled by on their way to the fields.

"Finished," sighed Chen Long. "Your life is no longer in my hands. Perhaps you may live if it is so decreed."

A whiff of ether put an end to the terrier's low moaning whine, and Chen Long went out of the room to open his store for another day.

It was a low, narrow place heaped with an amazing assortment of goods. From floor to ceiling it was cluttered with a thousand things—bags of copra, ginger in pot-bellied jars, jute-sacks, cases of standard oil, bolts of vivid-patterned cloth, rolls of wire netting, shelves filled with black boxes bearing Chinese characters in tarnished gold, tins of Australian jam and rusted American cutlery.

Time passed slowly. The sun came into the sky, driving the mists from the mango-swamp behind the store, an occasional Kanaka came in to purchase tobacco or matches, the stretch of road barred by the long shadows of early morning was empty. Nothing moved and the drone of insects filled the air.

With the dog in his arms Chen Long sat by the open doorway, brooding. A native suddenly stepped into the store.

"You want?" asked Chen Long.

"Look, you know me?" the boy said quickly.

"Yes, Mr. Littleton's boy, Marai. I know the voice. He has sent you?"

"No." Marai glanced nervously toward the door. "He no send me. I come——"

"Yes?"

"Him mad, plenty mad. Him call Mr. Keene, savvy?"

"Go on," prompted Chen Long, his voice quiet and gentle.

"You savvy Mr. Keene? Good. Master say you thief, try kill him, finish dead."

"So!"

"Marai hear. They come soon. I hear all thing. Master hide cash, say you fetch it, savvy? Say you take little fellow there."

He pointed at the dog sleeping in Chen Long's arms.

The latter shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"You know the truth?"

"Ko! Yes I know. I see last night. But master mad, I tell you. They come soon——"

"Then we shall tell them," placidly commented Chen Long. "You saw what happened, saw him and the dog. We tell the truth."

Marai caught him by the shoulder and shook him as he spoke.

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"No good, no good. Master say *you* hurt dog, savvy? All mens mad. They come make trouble for you. No believe me. No believe you. You go quick. Trot along road, savvy?"

"I stay here. Good boy, Marai, but I am not afraid."

Chen Long bent forward looking at the dog on his knees and murmured inarticulate words of comfort in its ear.

Marai groaned, spat, and again began to plead.

"You come along me," he urged. "I show you. They come soon. Me hide you, savvy?"

He dragged Chen Long to his feet.

"You give me tobacco once. Now me help you. Come."

"Just a minute."

Chen Long shook himself free and hurried into the back room, reemerging with an oblong black box which he thrust inside his coat.

"That," he said smilingly, "is the lumber-room of my dreams. But you do not understand. It contains a magic, the magic of my youth."

"Quick." Marai had no time for abstract speculations.

Roughly he thrust the old man before him, out of the house, across the road, into the heavy undergrowth beneath the trees.

Chen Long knelt behind the shrubbery still clasping the terrier in his arms. The boy was frightened, to humor him was easy. He would wait here until Littleton arrived, then he would step out and accuse him of his hideous brutality. His eyes were hurting, and the blurred outlines he could usually distinguish were nearly hidden in a whitish fog. He would have to be very careful or what little sight he still possessed would vanish. He sucked in his breath and his hands shook as he fondled the terrier's ears. Blind!

"They come, see," whispered Marai.

"I hear," nodded Chen Long again master of himself.

Around a bend in the path came Littleton, his head swathed in white cloths. With him marched a group of white men and behind came a crowd of coolies, laborers and excited natives armed with clubs and sticks. Silent and grim they hurried toward the store.

In, they rushed, swarming at the door and windows and harsh voices yelled:

"Chen Long come out! You yellow swine, come out and swing!"

"You see," chattered Marai. "They would kill."

"He's gone," they heard Littleton call out.

"Hunt him down!" some one shouted back.

"Smash his —— place," clamored a voice. "Smash ——"

The voice was covered by the gleeful yell of the crowd—

"Loot!"

The hysteria common to all mobs laid hold of the throng surging in the sunlight by the store. Cruel, unthinking, savage, it scattered and broke and defiled. Nothing escaped its frenzy, even the door came off its hinges and the thin weather boarding wall fell apart.

Behind the bushes Chen Long remained crouching. He knew that his discovery would spell his death. He could no more hope to face his despoilers and live than he could hope to explain his possession of the dog.

"Get back!"

The white men were at last trying to end the senseless destruction. A handful of them, shamed perhaps by the mobs' blind passion, were driving it off with blows and curses. Too late. Thin wisps of smoke oozed out between the shingles on the roof, a large puff eddied out through the doorway and suddenly the whole place blazed.

Flames, pale and almost invisible in the bright sunlight, capped by billows of smoke roared upwards, charring the branches of overhanging trees. The roof sagged, the walls bent as if crushed by an invisible hand and the flimsy structure fell in. The gaping crowd shrank away from the heat and slowly, regretfully dispersed.

Littleton excited and pale stood by the roadside surrounded by a small group of men. His voice reached Chen Long.

"As I expected," he was saying. "He's gone. Tried to kill me, the blighter. Robbed me, too. Took my pup, you know her—Cynthia. Poor little ——. I'll bet he's up to some rotten game. Keene, you're acting magistrate, what are you going to do about it?"

Keene moved uneasily as he answered:

"We have done a good deal already, haven't we? House in ruins. Mob of niggers sacking the place. It's a bad noise.

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Think of the Kanakas. And we haven't found Chen Long, eh?"

"Well, find him," an exasperated voice cried. "Find him and scupper him, says I. Look at what he did to Littleton. —— it, man, we can't have chinks running wild here. And who knows anything about him either? Who is he? Him and his smooth ways. Never could stand him. Why haven't we got a white man for a trader I want to know. Keene, it's up to you, to get him."

"If I do, no more mobbing," Keene warned them. "I'm acting magistrate, I'm the law's strong right arm, a supernumerary right arm without pay, but if I find him, folks, we'll lock him up for trial and all that, eh?"

"Oh, that suits me," Littleton agreed magnanimously. "You're quite right. Lynching is a bad thing. Go on and get him though. He should be punished, otherwise this thing might become a hobby with our aliens. Ha!"

The laugh on his lips suddenly changed to an exclamation of dismay and his hand instinctively gripped his right side.

"What's wrong?" asked Keene.

"Nothing," Littleton answered in a puzzled voice. "Nothing—at least I don't know of anything. Just a twinge in the side. Hurt like blazes. It's better now."

"Liver," Keene laughed. "Don't drink so much, my lad. Well, I must be off. I'll scout around the coast first and then go in land. Want to come, anybody?"

"I'll go with you," Littleton answered. "I'm anxious to meet Chen Long."

"YOU heard," commented Marai, when the party had gone. "They catch you now you finish dead. You go hide, maybe by-m'-by they forget, then you live, savvy?"

In silence Chen Long crossed the road and stood staring at the smoldering pile of rubbish.

"I have nothing left," he said gently. "Not one thing. I shall go to the magistrate. If they kill me it does not matter. At least I am free, not bound as they are to the Wheel of Things. My mind they can not injure, that at least is still mine."

The glare of the sun now high overhead awoke the terrier. She whined miserably and thrust her head into the hollow of his arm.

"But I am wrong, little one," he smiled. "I am not free. If I let them take me, then you too would suffer. I must keep clear until you are well."

He turned to Marai.

"Where do I go?"

They went through the bush, along an overgrown track where thorns and branches lashed and tore at Chen Long's face. He never complained, but followed steadily, close behind Marai, shielding the dog with his open hand. The path led them away from the settlement and the swampy lowlands; jungle gave way to forest. They fled tirelessly, never pausing and at last the ground underfoot became rocky and hard. Chen Long tripped and stumbled over loose stones, his rope sandals were cut and his tunic hung in tatters.

As the sun dipped behind the hills they went down into a valley full of purple shadows. Strips of cultivated land appeared here and there behind rough fences; the path became smoother, wider, and at last above the tree-tops a group of huts appeared.

"My village," said Marai.

NINE days, nine quiet days Chen Long spent among the natives. Marai, experienced and sagacious, made all things easy. He explained to the assembled people that his companion was a fugitive from justice and should be protected. Gravely they assented. Marai's friend was their friend. They made him free of the lodge of the secret society, a short distance from the cluster of huts. Here they came and stared and marveled while he tended the injured dog. Such tenderness! Ko! To waste it on a dog. Perhaps it was his *talau*, his clan totem, just as theirs was the green lizard. Then, of course, he must make it well or he would die.

The villagers shook their heads doubtfully. It was a bad omen. This stranger could not keep his *talau* alive although he gave it all his time and care. If it died and a calamity befell would they not suffer too? White men's justice was implacable—if inexplicable. Moreover, Marai had declared that the newcomer was not of the white men's clan. Would it not be safer to hand him over and be rid of all danger?

They assembled one night in open council and summoned Marai before them.

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Row upon row they stood and knelt and squatted in a wide semi-circle about a great fire which threw dancing red lights over their oiled black bodies. Here and there an arm-band of polished shell, a necklet of bone, a bit of metal in a distended ear-lobe winked and twinkled in the ruddy glare against the dark background of close-packed humanity.

Endlessly they plied Marai with questions, they wore him down slowly without hurry after the fashion of all people who make their own time and to whom discussion is as meat and drink.

"He stole the dog, you say," grumbled Nganepa, Marai's uncle, who stood high in the secret lodge.

"As I said—because it was in pain."

"But it belonged to this other one in whose service you are. It is his to dispose of."

"Not to kill in that fashion, by slow burning."

"And why not if he chose? It is his——"

"They would kill this man for such an offense and he has committed no crime."

"The ways of the white men are not our ways. Did they not track down Pwawi for Ndalo's offense? Did they not send Vanura across the waters because he took tobacco which he needed? If they want this man let us give him up and have peace. And his magic in the black box which he treats with such reverence. Who knows what danger it may not mean. Do *you* know what it is?"

"He said it was dream magic," began Marai.

"Wait," Nganepa held up a warning hand. "Listen!"

Faintly, no more than a pulsating throb, there came the sound of a drum beaten away off beyond the hills. For a space no one moved as the sound came to them out of the darkness. It ceased and they relaxed.

"You heard the message from Puneyo where my sister lives," said Nganepa. "Those two white men will be here to-morrow. Are we to be found hiding their victim?"

Marai tried to speak, but Nganepa silenced him.

"No more talk. I order now. Go down to Puneyo and stop these men. Tell them we shall bring down the culprit."

"I can not," mumbled Marai. "The man is my friend and the dog is not his *talau*. In his clan such beings are unknown."

"Wah!" Nganepa waved away such a suggestion. "This is foolishness, all men have their particular *talau*. Do you think because you have lived with white folk that all things are known to you? And am I not your mother's brother? Obey!"

Marai was defeated. Down in the settlement he might sneer at his kinsman's beliefs, but here in the eerie darkness, peered at by a hundred disapproving eyes, he could not fight against the tribal law.

"At dawn I shall take him," he said humbly, and the gathering sighed its approval.

They laughed and yawned and stretched. A woman, her grass skirt swaying jerkily on her hips stepped out of the shadows; she stamped her feet and clapped her hands, her body swayed from side to side as the tribesmen began to croon the dance song. Louder and shriller grew the voices, other women joined in the dance, drums were dragged out of the huts adding their sonorous, rhythmical beat to the volume of sound and the villagers, their troubles momentarily forgotten, shrieked their joy. One by one the performers at last fell to the ground, laughing and exhausted. There followed a lull while the young men made ready for their turn.

"O Marai!" Chen Long's uplifted voice carried above the hum. "Guide me for I can not see in the night."

They made way for him, a slight figure in his tattered coat, and he came into the circle of light, grave and impassive as ever. Marai, dragging his feet, slowly went to his side.

"The dog," said Chen Long.

"The dog?" Marai repeated stupidly, conscious of his kinsman's suspicious glances.

"Dead."

"Ko! What you do now?"

"I go back to the magistrate."

A growl came from the crowd.

"Tell, tell! What does he say?"

Marai held up his hand to command silence.

"His dog is finished. It died while we sang. Now he will leave us and surrender. All things are well."

"How do you know he will surrender?" grumbled Nganepa.

"That is his wish."

"Then he is mad and we must make sure

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he does not change his mind. You shall take him to Puneyo and give him to the white men."

They set out in the cool of early morning. Marai led the way, sullen and ill-at-ease, but Chen Long was as unruffled as ever. Neither the heat nor the arduous road affected his temper and his face was expressionless.

Now that the dog was gone he was anxious to face Littleton and bring the affair to an end. He had done no wrong. On the other hand they had ruined him. His home was destroyed and his stock of goods scattered and stolen. But he had been thrifty and had saved enough money to start in again elsewhere—if his eyes grew no worse. The strain and fatigue had irritated them, however. They were like balls of hot pain in his head and only with difficulty could he see Marai marching along ahead of him.

"A little slower," he suggested. "My old legs are already tired."

"We finish quick," brutally retorted Marai. "See master plenty soon. Him mad. Bad for Marai."

"Why come with me?"

"Oh, they find me sometime. Better now. Me say me bring you back, *savvy?*" He chuckled. "Then master pleased."

"Yes? You pleased, too?"

"Plenty. You not much good. Let dog die. Too old maybe. Wah!" He grew angry. "Me tomfool. You no good. Make trouble. Why you take dog belong master?"

Chen Long did not bother to answer the question.

"You are right," he said. "Hurry."

He was alone now. The savage and the white man, both were turned against him. Both were afraid. A smile played about his thin lips. He could endure suffering. After all these were children. Littleton's breed had produced a material civilization, but its mind in its lack of clear thought was still childish. It lacked poise and balance. They were young these white men and already they showed signs of decay. They possessed no self-control. They would injure him as a child kicks the stool that trips it. Littleton for all his efficiency and wealth was a throwback, nearer the animal than Marai.

"He can not help it," thought Chen Long. "They have not overcome their instincts, these supermen. Sober, Littleton would like to fight his fellow beings but is afraid to do so. Drunk, he turns against a dog to satisfy his desire to hurt and injure. To see others suffer pleases him as it pleases a cat to play with a mouse."

They halted at noontime by the side of a swift-flowing stream where they drank and rested.

Here and Littleton and Keene found them sprawling in the grass.

"At last!" Keene exclaimed thankfully. "Put 'em up, Chen Long. You are under arrest."

Marai threw himself at Littleton's feet and a torrent of words poured from his lips. He had found the criminal, see, he was bringing him to justice. He had hunted him down at great risk to himself.

"Shut up," ordered Littleton.

He looked at Chen Long, fear and hatred in his face.

"Where's my pup?" he demanded.

"It died."

"He killed it!" screamed Littleton. "Killed my pup. The ——, the ——"

"Easy there," urged Keene. "We've got him now. Let's make tracks for home."

But Littleton was beside himself with terror lest Chen Long speak, lest he find an opportunity to establish his case. He turned again to Marai, cringing at his feet.

"And you!" he growled. "You found him did you? Liar, you ran away with him. You warned him."

"Master, no——"

"Stop it!" Littleton lashed himself into a fury. "You were seen, I tell you. No use denying it. You're as guilty as that Chinaman. Wait until I get you back."

"For Heaven's sake, cut out the rough stuff," shouted Keene. "I want to go home. D'you want to waste a couple of weeks here or what?"

As they prepared to move off Chen Long spoke for the first time.

"What charge is brought against me?" he asked quietly.

"Assault and robbery, my aged bandit," answered Keene.

"I deny the accusation. This is what happened: As I passed Mr. Littleton's bungalow I heard——"

With a yell Littleton threw himself off his horse and struck Chen Long full in the mouth, struck him again and again until he reeled and fell to his knees.

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"Are you daft?" Keene demanded as he hurried forward. "What do you think you're doing, collecting reparations? He'll get all that's coming to him when he's tried. Let up and make a start."

A change came over Littleton. His face was ashen, and his eyes filled with tears. He gasped and gripped his right side with both hands.

"Is that thing hurting again?" asked Keene. "You'd better go down to Vila and let the doctor patch you up."

Slowly Littleton straightened up.

"It's hurting more and more," he answered nervously. "And I can feel a lump there. It doubles me up when it begins to ache. I'll go to Vila when this business is over."

"Right. Let's go. But you've delayed us. What the blazes did you have to beat up the old fellow for? Now I've got to put him on my horse. Here, Marai, give us a hand."

THE journey down to the coast became torture to Littleton. The pain in his side made him groan between clenched teeth and he clutched the pommel of the saddle with both hands to keep his seat. Through half-closed eyelids he saw Chen Long riding beside him. A thin streak of blood, dark red against the parchment-like skin, ran from mouth to chin, but the old man sat inert, inscrutable. The black glasses shielding his eyes were as a curtain between his personality and the rest of mankind.

Littleton was fascinated by the streak of blood. It irritated him immeasurably. Why didn't Chen Long wipe it off? It was disgusting. He must be told—

The pain in his side was diminishing, or rather its intensity was spreading through all his body. From head to foot Littleton felt wrapped in pain, but his mind was astonishingly clear and detached. He must wait and see Chen Long silenced. He must—

Chen Long's face, grown enormous, seemed to radiate warm light. For some reason the goggles were pushed up off his eyes, which were white and cold and hard as marble. They were boring into him, boring into his hidden soul.

He couldn't stand it! A cry came to his dry lips:

"Wipe it off!" he shouted hoarsely. "wipe that blood off."

Keene's voice reached him through a woolly mist.

"Hold on, my lad, we're nearly there now. Hold on!"

He closed his eyes to shut out the sight of Chen Long and in his ears, interminably, an awful voice kept droning—

"Hold on, hold on, hold on."

Some one was walking by the side of his horse, holding him in the saddle. He gave himself up to the overpowering pain and moaned at each step, his head rolling jerkily from right to left.

Slowly the small group made its way through the bush, the sea came into sight, and at dusk they reached the settlement. The track led them past the houses of several planters, friends of Littleton, who formed a grumbling escort, only kept in check by Keene's constant pleadings.

Their resentment increased when they saw Littleton carried into his house. Fists were shaken in Chen Long's face, Marai was kicked and jostled, until Keene hustled them both indoors and thrust them into a corner of the living-room.

"Keep quiet," he told them. "Don't as much as squeak if you want to live. I'll try to pacify that gang."

He was shaking with excitement when he stepped out on to the dark veranda where the angry men were holding council. His agitated voice reached Che Long through the open window.

"Look here, you people," he was saying. "Get this straight—you can't start anything around here. I don't give a hoot for the two birds in there, but think of Littleton. He's a sick man, you've seen that. We can't move him until tomorrow morning and then it will take three days to get him to Vila and a doctor. Just keep quiet and let him rest. I don't know whether he'll hold out—looks mighty bad."

"Poor ——," one man murmured. "We're sorry for him, Keene, but that's all the more reason why you should hand Chen Long and that black boy over to us. We'll give 'em justice."

"Nothing doing."

"And we say yes, d'you understand? Let's get it over. Quiet does it. There's seven of us. We can handle 'em both without any fuss. Come on, Keene, don't be a fool. We mean it."

"Can't be done," Keene insisted.

"Then stand clear."

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There followed a scuffle and a grunt of surprize. A body fell heavily to the ground.

"Now will you stop," Keene went on. "If you want to muss me up just to get at a heathen Chinese——"

Then Marai, unable to stand this fight for his life, rushed to the window.

"Marai done nothing," he wailed. "Marai——"

"Come here!"

A hand caught him by the hair and savagely jerked him out on to the veranda.

"That's one of 'em. Now the other, Keene, if you please."

Marai bellowed as they bound him and his clamor shook Littleton out of his dazed condition. He dragged himself off his bed, crept to the door and fell at their feet whispering:

"Do something for me. It hurts so much—so much."

They carried him back to his room and stood huddled against the wall watching him suffer, made helpless by his writhing agony.

"Will you let me help?"

They started awkwardly as Chen Long appeared in the doorway. In the lamplight his face was yellower than ever and as placid as a sleeping child's.

"What can you do?" inquired Keene.

A man tiptoed across the room and caught Chen Long by the arm.

"Got you," he whispered. "Don't move or I'll brain you. You can't do a thing here, but you're needed outside. Come on."

The old man spoke to him as one speaks to a headstrong child:

"I am your prisoner, I can not escape, that is understood. Now let me speak, then you shall judge. Six years ago when my eyesight failed I came to Santo. So much most of you know. Before that I was in America where I learnt your language."

"Oh, hurry up," grumbled Keene. "What's that got to do with helping Littleton?"

"A great deal. I was then studying medicine."

"You!"

"Yes, at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, until I developed optic neuritis. I am a poor man. I exhausted all my savings seeking a cure. I found none. I could not graduate, for I was warned that to use my eyes again would mean total blindness. My troubles do not concern you, and I shall be brief. I was no longer a young man, there was nothing I could do. People were kind, others helpful and at last I saved enough to come out here. But I have not forgotten, in here—" he tapped his forehead—"I have kept my notes. And now that you know—" there was scorn in the level voice—"if you will release Marai I will try to save this man."

"It can't be done. You're blind. You'll kill him."

"Will you let Marai go free?"

"Yes, but——"

"It is Littleton's only chance. When Marai is released——"

They obeyed, and Marai stumbled away from the house, chattering with fear.

Silence filled the stiflingly hot room. No one moved as Chen Long walked to the bed and bent over Littleton's unconscious form. Long minutes elapsed and when he straightened up the placid look had gone from his face, he was suddenly quick and active.

"Appendicitis," he said, "I can not remove it. We'll have to drain it and send him down to the Vila hospital. I must operate now."

He took off his spectacles and for the first time the onlookers saw his narrow eyes, a little dulled, but straight and eager. He rapped out his instructions as if he were in a clinical ward.

"The room must be cleared at once. No crowd, no noise. He would need chloroform. The missionary had a bottle in his dispensary. Bandages—

"How do we know all this is true?" interposed the man who had seized his arm. "You're under arrest, you know."

"Oh, later, later," Chen Long brushed him aside.

"Dissecting forceps, scalpel, artery forceps. These I have."

He drew his precious black case from his tunic.

"Gut—Tomlinson's banjo strings will do. Send him for them. Drainage tubes. Get the rubber tubing off Crellat's engine. Quickly, there is no time to waste.

"You, Keene, stay here. Help me fix the room."

As he stepped forward his foot crunched down on his forgotten spectacles. They splintered into a hundred pieces, but he went on unconcerned with his preparations.



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At last all things were ready. Three oil-lamps shed their combined light upon the sheet-covered table, near by a home-made steriliser steamed and bubbled and Chen Long in a suit of clean pajamas stood at the foot of the bed, looking down at Littleton. He turned to Keene and Crellat whom he had retained to assist him.

"Carry him to the table," he said in a dry, dispassionate voice.

Littleton recovered consciousness and groaned as they raised him. He caught sight of Chen Long and his ashen face was full of horror.

"Don't let him speak," he begged. "Keene, he mustn't speak!"

"I am silent," Chen Long reassured him. "Lie still and have no fear."

"Now the pad, please, as I showed you," he went on, addressing Keene. "That is right—over the nose and mouth.

"Breathe deeply—breathe again. Go—to—sleep—ah!"

Swiftly with dexterous fingers Chen Long set to work. The minutes, heavy with the reek of chloroform, dragged slowly by. Keene, standing at Littleton's head, grew faint and nauseated; he wanted to turn away, but the sight of Chen Long so sure of himself, so competent filled him with amazement. The idea that this man had robbed and battered Littleton became incredible.

"Now the tubes," snapped Chen Long. "Finished with the pad; thank you, Keene. Now the needle again. Finished."

He drew himself up and for a space stood silent and motionless, his arms hanging limply at his sides, his shoulders stooped and old.

"All right," he went on listlessly. "Carry him back to the bed, that's all we can do. He will be coming around in a little while. I want you to stand by."

"Well done," murmured Keene. "Oh, well done. I never imagined——"

"Hush, he moves——"

Littleton was still unconscious, his flaccid, relaxed face was gray except for heavy violet crescents beneath the eyelids which were beginning to flutter.

"What made a man like you steal that dog of his?" Crellat asked Chen Long.

Dog! The word reached Littleton through the mists still clouding his brain. Dog! In a dream he was again in his living-room with the pup lying bound upon the table. He smelt again the odor of singing hair, heard the high yelp of pain. He grinned; the grin became a low, delirious chuckle.

"Cynthia!" he shouted. "I'll do what I like with her—she's mine."

In disjointed sentences, now yelling, now whispering, now tossing and moaning, he reenacted the scene with Chen Long until at last the dream faded and returning consciousness made him aware of the dull ache in his side. He fell silent.

Keene whistled softly. Clumsily he caught Chen Long by the elbow.

"If only I had known. I'm desperately sorry, and I know when the others find out——"

"It is of little importance," murmured Chen Long, passing a weary hand across his eyes. "He will live to experience the mercy of his kind—and he will perhaps curse me for saving him.

"And now, will you lead me away from this place, for my work is done and I can see no more at all."

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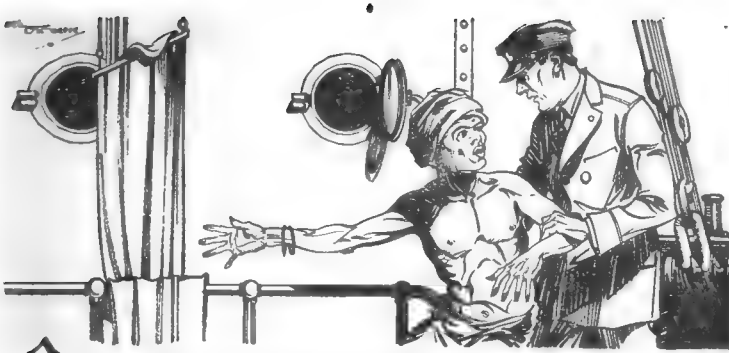

# The Fantom Honor

## By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

*Author of "I'll Show 'Em," "That Pair of Shoulders," etc.*

THE sun rose from a turquoise sea and tinged the soft blue sky with crimson. A cool breeze crept over the face of the waters and crooned musically through the scanty rigging of the steam freighter *Maloee*, combining with the equally musical ripple of the tropic sea along the red-painted hull. The same breeze ruffled the glassy swells and stirred the mate's curly hair, as he stood in the starboard wing of the bridge and idly gazed at a school of porpoises through his binoculars. From behind him came the creak of the wheel, set under a sort of roof that jutted out from the forward end of the chart-house, as the leather-faced helmsman slowly turned the spokes back and forth, while his head twisted now and then so that he could see the face of the large clock through the glass windows of the house behind him. It was near the end of his trick and he was anxious to get back to his mattress in the shade of the forecastle-head awnings.

The *Maloee* lifted her old hull over a glassy swell and subsided wearily into the trough, every rivet in her plates creaking, and her ancient engines thumping their hearts out, and incidentally the hearts of their tenders. The freighter's decks were cluttered with the forms and baggage of hundreds, of natives, returning to their home islands after their various terms of labor on a dozen or more plantations. The stench that rose from the sweating, packed humanity was a stain on the pure morning air, and the mate sniffed disgustedly as the wind bore down a whiff to him.

From the forcastle-head came the low croon of an old Paumotuan love song, where a young wife sat cross-legged, weaving a hat of bleached pandanus leaves for her husband. The mate smiled as he listened. The song recalled to him the day when he had been a schooner-sailor among the southern islets, and it was not so long ago either. But now he was the chief officer of the *Maloee*, bound from Singapore to Papeete, and the happy days among the islands were over for him. Life on board a steamship is very different from life on board a sailing-craft in the stretches of the Pacific. The mate sighed as he turned from the bridge wing and dropped his binoculars in the glass rack.

With a flutter of white skirts a woman came up the port companion and crossed the bridge, a smile dimpling her small oval face and setting the lights dancing in her brown eyes. The mate gave an exclamation of pleasure as he raised his cap, but no sign of the quickening of his pulse appeared on his face.

"Another fine morning, Mr. Redmond. I just couldn't resist coming up here to catch a full view of the sunrise, though I



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know passengers are not allowed to invade the bridge."

Rather decent of her, thought the mate, as he made some laughing response, to admit she had broken an iron sea law, especially when she owned the *Maloee* and a dozen similar freighters besides.

It is not usually pleasant to have one's owner sail as a passenger. There are all sorts of faults that might be found, and one has to be on best behavior, fearful all the time. But when the owner happens to be a charming young woman with a genuine love for travel and the sea, the case assumes a different aspect.

For perhaps an hour they talked and watched the sunrise, the young woman fresh from the bustle of great cities, and the sailor who could not afford to enjoy the cities at all. The helmsman was relieved and went below, and seven bells struck before the girl, with a final sally, turned to go.

"Stay a little longer," the mate pleaded. "I've been up here alone since four o'clock."

The woman shook her head. She had been acutely conscious of the man's admiring, wondering scrutiny for some time past, and she was a little pink.

"I'm sorry, but I promised to look over the engines with Mr. Larkin. Good-by till breakfast time."

With a gay laugh she was gone. The mate swore to himself, and the glorious morning took on a dull tint for him. Larkin was the second engineer, a carefree young fellow whose father was one of the biggest ship-owners on the Australian coast. The young man was working his way up from the bottom according to his father's plan, and he was very intimate with Mary Brantly. He would come into a vast fortune one day, and what chance did a penniless ship's officer stand? The old love song drifted down on the wind from the forecastle-head.

"Aw, quit," growled the mate wrathfully, as he stumped away to the wing of the bridge again and picked up the binoculars.

There was a pad-pad of naked feet on the planking, as a native leaped the companion and crossed the bridge. His eyes were starting from his head, and his throat worked spasmodically. His claw-like hands gripped the mate's white jacket and swung him around.

*"Tuan! Tuan!"*

The mate shook off the man angrily and swore.

"What the —— are you doing here? Get out of it or I'll have you flogged! This place is taboo to you, savvy?"

The native gulped, whispered *Tuan* again, appealingly, and then reached for the mate's ear. What he said had an extraordinary effect on the white man. He glanced hastily at the yawning helmsmen to see if he had heard, then dragged the half-paralyzed native into the chart-room and shut the door. He questioned the man in fierce whispers, gripping him harshly by the shoulder, the pain of the grip unnoticed by the native in his fear.

WHEN he was through the mate sank back on the settee against the bulkhead and groaned. The released native crouched away and mumbled to himself, while a flicker of foam appeared between his betel-stained lips. The helmsman looked over his shoulder curiously, wondered what all the fuss was about, and then turned back to nod over the binnacle and the compass-card indifferently.

"Oh, my God! Four hundred natives on deck and below—and white women aboard," the mate moaned, apparently irrelevantly.

For a moment he seemed to go completely to pieces. His broad shoulders shrunk, and his head dropped on his breast. He breathed heavily.

The anxiously watching native, who had been taught all his life to look upon the white man for courage and calm confidence, suddenly felt his straining control snap. He commenced to scream, the high-pitched scream of sheer fright, and then the mate awoke to life and action. He sprang to his feet and clapped a hand across the native's mouth. The scream died to an abrupt gurgle, before it was properly born. After much shaking the native recovered some of his self-possession.

*"Tuan! Tuan!"* he moaned piteously.

The mate looked at him without speaking, and then ran a shaking hand across his own forehead. It was beaded with sweat. There came a silvery ripple of laughter from aft, faint through the closed chart-room doors, and the mate stiffened abruptly. His shoulders set back, and his jaw was squared aggressively. He was once more an officer in charge of many destinies, the *tuan*—lord as the native called him. He spoke sharply to the brown man, and together they left

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the chart-house and went down the bridge companion on to the main deck.

The mate caught sight of his third officer leaning against the saloon bulkhead and smoking a cigaret, talking the while, between gusts of laughter, with the slim, dark-haired girl who leaned against the lintel of the saloon door. She was Miss Brantly's maid, and she seemed not at all averse to the young officer's company.

"Mr. Travers!" snapped the mate sharply, holding the native by one elbow.

The third officer looked around surprized, and flicking away his cigaret with a word of apology to the girl he came forward.

"I wish you would take the bridge for a few minutes," the mate whispered.

Then his voice dropped still lower and he breathed a few words into the third officer's ear. Almost the same emotions shook the younger man as had shaken the older. He staggered back as if some one had dealt him a blow, and licked his suddenly dry lips. His blue, laughing eyes, that not two minutes before had twinkled with the joy of youth, grew hard and bitter. Even his mouth sagged and the red of his lips disappeared. He seemed suddenly very old and tired. With a shaking hand he pressed the mate's arm. Then, without another word, he went up on the bridge, while the dark-haired girl went off into the saloon with a pout and a swish of skirts.

Following the native, the mate went forward, stepping gingerly among the outspread forms on the awning-shaded deck and the many shapeless bundles that lay between. Occasionally a native who happened to be awake would call to him in jest or mockery, mostly in good humor.

Clear to the catsheads forward the native led the mate, past where the young wife was still crooning her old love song and weaving her hat of bleached leaves, to where, on a lumpy mattress, a man lay twisting and muttering deliriously. His form was thin and wasted and burning up with fever. His eyes, big, burning and black, rested for a moment on the mate's white uniform suit and then turned listlessly away.

The mate's teeth were clenched tight to keep him from crying out as he bent slowly over the prostrate man. He noticed the skin was curiously mottled with purple spots and patches; and, running an exploring hand under the arm-pits, he drew in his breath sharply as he felt the tell-tale lumps.

He straightened abruptly and turned to the native who had brought him. He must get rid of the man.

"Get cold water and bathe this man with it, all over. Keep on doing it until I tell you to stop, savvy?"

The native bobbed in his fright and sped away, half-sobbing in his throat.

Left alone, the mate hesitated and then slowly drew his automatic. The rumble of the bow-wash would help drown the sound of a shot, as would the noise of the wind. He looked stealthily round. No one was watching him that he could see. The forcastle-head was of the top gallant type, raised above the main deck, and the natives below could not see him. There were a few sleeping around, it was true, but that could not be helped. Better one man than four hundred.

He looked at the tossing man on the mattress, and his jaw set grimly. He leveled the gun.

A hand seized his arm and forced it down, and his finger relaxed on the trigger. He looked to one side wonderingly and gazed into the eyes of the young native wife, the half-finished hat of bleached leaves dangling from her one free hand. She did not speak, but such a fury blazed through her that the mate dropped his head and pocketed the automatic. He knew he was a fool, and that he should shoot. But he could not face those eyes. He stumbled moodily aft.

IN THE alleyway that ran under the lower bridge on the port side, he met Mary Brantly and the second engineer, Larkin, going forward. They were talking gaily and did not see the mate until he almost ran into them. He put out a detaining hand.

"Where are you going?" he demanded curtly.

The engineer flushed a little and met the other's gaze. He evidently thought the mate, in his capacity as his superior officer, was going to forbid him to walk the foredeck with Mary Brantly. There was hostility in his eyes.

"May I ask what that has to do with you?"

The woman stood apart a few paces and wrinkled her brow, her gaze running from one man to the other. She sensed the antagonism between the two men was over her and felt a thrill of pride. The mate's voice was a trifle unsteady.

"Quit that talk, Larkin. I'm not trying

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to be officious now. You must not take Miss Brantly for'ard."

The woman started forward at this, and her face flushed with anger.

"How dare you, Mr. Redmond! How dare you!"

The mate looked at her for one long moment, and she flinched for some unaccountable reason at the agony in his eyes. Then she tossed her head and turned away, mentally resolving that he should pay for the insult to Mr. Larkin. The mate leaned forward and whispered in the second engineer's ear. The young man went a ghastly white, muttered: "Is that so? My God!" and then turned in haste to the woman, angrily tapping her white shoes on the deck and gazing out overside, her hand on her hip.

"Mr. Redmond is right, we must not go for'ard," said the second engineer huskily, and, seizing the amazed woman's arm, he led her into the saloon.

Then he went to call the chief engineer and others not on watch.

Half an hour later the saloon was crowded with the deck officers, all except the mate, who had gone back to the bridge—the captain, and the engineers and the steward, all who had any authority on board. After some consideration on the part of the captain, Miss Brantly, though she was the owner of the *Maloee*, was not called. There are some things men must discuss in private, away from the ears of womenfolk.

When the conclave came from behind the closed doors of the saloon fifteen minutes later, Mary Brantly was seized with alarm at the grayness she observed on every man's face. She waylaid the second engineer and almost frantic with curiosity and half-felt dread pleaded with him to tell her what the matter was. He had not the courage.

"Ask the mate," he jerked out, his voice harsh. "Excuse me, I must get on watch."

He hurried away, and the woman, with an exclamation of anger and impatience, went up on the bridge and demanded that the mate tell her what the other man would not.

For a long time the broad-shouldered, blue-eyed man gazed unseeing over the furled bridge-dodger toward the limitless horizon, clear-cut under the blaze of the morning sun. A school of flying-fish that broke water in front of the *Maloee's* bows even failed to attract his attention.

"Please," the woman insisted, tugging at his sleeve.

He looked down at her at last and nodded gravely.

"Very well. You will have to know sometime. I warn you though to keep your nerve and not get hysterical, and to keep your maid quiet too. Do you think you can?"

"My father was a sailor," the woman said quietly, sobered a little.

"That's true." The mate was silent again for a while, then—

"Death has come aboard the *Maloee*, death in one of its most horrible forms."

The words were melodramatic, but the tone of voice the mate used, grave, heavy with apprehension, made them appear simple and unaffected, tense with meaning.

"A disease has broken out among the natives," he resumed, and then was silent again, still gazing unseeing over the furled bridge-dodger.

The woman caught her breath sharply. Her eyes widened, and the hand she held his coat sleeve with tightened round his arm.

"Measles?" she whispered. That is a common disease among the Kanakas of the south.

The mate shook his head.

The woman hesitated.

"Dysentery?" she ventured.

She caught her breath again and held it. Vaguely she knew a great fear. Perhaps she sensed the Shape that brooded over the *Maloee*, and heard the dull beating of wings. The mate coughed.

"Worse than measles, worse than dysentery," he said. Then, throwing up his head, like a man who takes a long meditated plunge, "Bubonic!"

There was a gasp of horror. Mary Brantly turned as white as chalk. One hand went to her throat, another to her breast. She fell back half a pace and stared up at the mate. He refused to meet her eyes and, turning, walked briskly to the end of the bridge. He heard a half-sob, it may have been of fright, and when he turned the woman was gone. He shook his head as he paced the bridge, and his face was gray beneath his tan as he thought of the days and nights of terror that faced him.

LIKE a bolt from the deeper blue death struck the *Maloee*. She carried no wireless, and in any case no other ship would have dared to come near her. She had to fight out her own

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salvation, plow on across the smiling sea a floating charnel-house until the end, which would come long before she reached Papeete, if she ever did. She carried no doctor, which she ought to have done with the natives on board her. There was a chance, though, that if she met up with a warship a doctor might be sent aboard. But that time was in the future. For the present there was no warship in sight, and the plague raged unchecked.

Like a scythe the scourge mowed the natives down. The man on the mattress forward was dead before noon, and his body was shot from the burial grating before it had had time to cool. His young wife sat mute and motionless in the shadow of the fo'c's'le-head awnings, the still unfinished hat of bleached leaves in her lap. Now and again, as if unconscious she was doing it, she would croon a few words of the old Paumotuan love song, to check herself with a shudder. She refused to eat or drink. Her dark languorous eyes stared straight before her. She had not been married very long.

When night fell a dozen men and three women had gone by way of the grating, balanced on the rail near the port chains. A dozen others were sick. The rest huddled together in a huge bunch on the foredeck and chewed betelnut unceasingly, and rocked to and fro with the numb terror of the monstrous and the unknown gnawing at their hearts. They had not even enough initiative to get panic-stricken. They sat like numb, unfeeling cattle awaiting the death stroke, something of fatalists, dying already because resigned to die.

There was no way to check the plague that any one aboard knew. Sailors and engineers have quite enough to do to study for their working certificates without studying medicine. True, the mate was supposed to act as doctor, but he knew little more than how to set a broken limb, or to dose a man for grippe. From his books he found that a treatment of cold, fresh water was useful in cases of plague, and he had the sick bathed continually. The water in the tanks was lukewarm, and he had buckets of it left in the refrigerator—the ship did possess a small one—for a few minutes until the liquid was cold. That was all he could do, all he knew. Half-heartedly he distributed what disinfectant he had, without knowing whether it would be any good.

When, on the second day, the plague started to attack the white people aboard, what little courage was left in the crew deserted them. They abandoned work. Many of them were white men, some lascars, all of them the sweepings of the eastern water-fronts. They sat and glowered and smoked, and sometimes listlessly played cards, and refused to turn a hand to working the ship. Secretly they plotted amongst themselves.

Very grimly the mate, made bold by the rawness of what they faced, pointed out to Mary Brantly, when she crept to him on the bridge the afternoon of the second day like a frail, frightened wraith, the folly of hiring cheap help. If the manager who ran the woman's steamship line for her was not so intent on paying dividends, and gave more attention to the seaworthiness of the ships he controlled, the *Maloee* would have had a decent, dependable crew in time of crisis. This the mate said, and this the woman admitted, and promised to remedy.

The mate laughed at that. It was too late to remedy the thing on the *Maloee*, too late perhaps to remedy the thing on the other ships of the Brantly Line. He was brutal and savage, and he sent the woman away in tears before he recovered his temper and realized her sex.

That night the crew's plotting drew to a head. The mate was snatching a few hours of troubled sleep in his cabin, as were most on board who could, and the second mate was on watch on the bridge. One or two of the crew who remained faithful were keeping the engines turning, and one was at the wheel. The natives huddled together on the foredeck and slumbered fitfully, anon one waking with a startled cry, as he saw some vision of his island home in the darkness, or as he dreamed a nightmare such as he had lived during the day. The ship lay in darkness, except for the white foremast light, the stern light, and the red and green navigation lights to port and starboard of the bridge. The glimmer of the oil lamp in the binnacle was hardly noticeable.

Toward four bells, two o'clock in the morning, two men crept up the bridge companion and, catching the second mate unawares, knocked him unconscious with a mallet taken from the storekeeper's locker. They bound and gagged him with flags from the signal lockers and then, going down on to the lower bridge, they imprisoned the rest of the deck officers by the

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simple process of locking the cabin doors. The same thing was done by two men who made a round of the engineers' cabins, those that were occupied at least. Then the mutinous crew adjourned to the boat deck. The engineers on watch were in the engine-room and out of the way. They could be left alone.

Carefully the crew lowered the two best boats, numbers three and four, on the fiddley and just a little forward of the one lean smokestack. They took from the remaining boats their water-breakers and cans of biscuits, and when all was ready pushed off, quaking with the horror of what they were leaving behind them, thankful to get away. They rowed for a while until the *Maloee* had steamed on and was nearly out of sight. Then they hoisted the sails and steered for the south under the directions of the squat, hairy Danish boatswain who had had a look at the chart, spread out on the table in the chart-room on the bridge, some hours previously.

It was his hope to make the Tonga Islands which lay somewhere in that direction. He calculated everything finely, making only one mistake. The boats had taken something away from the *Maloee* besides provisions and water-breakers, something that would not be left behind, but crouched like a vicious grinning demon by each man's elbow and struck him with fear. Bubonic!

The boats were never found.

THE helmsman released the second mate as soon as he dared. He knew that if he had interfered with the mutineers he would have been treated as the officer was, so he had steered steadily on and said nothing while the second mate was being bound. But now the boats were gone and the creaking of tackles and falls had ceased, he gathered enough courage to leave the wheel for a few moments and undo the lashings of bunting that held the slowly recovering officer. Then he rushed back to the wheel, just in time to prevent the ship from sheering wildly in a circle off her course.

The mate received the news with a grunt when the captain came to his cabin to inform him. He was hardly disturbed. A sort of apathy had come over him, was coming over all the white men aboard, as it had long ago come over the natives. What did it matter? Perhaps the men were right in clearing out. The burden of authority and command was that one could not clear out when one liked. It was a case of stay and fight, to the last man and the last ounce of strength.

The mate went with the captain to inspect the dangling overhauled falls that swung with the ship's motion from the davits, and then went down on to the main deck to see how the plague was progressing. It had increased in violence during the night. Most of the previous day's sick were dead, and many others besides. Fifty or more were exhibiting the first signs of the fever.

By the light of two or three hurricane lanterns under the stifling awnings of the foredeck, the ship's officers worked until dawn, moving from man to man, sorting out the dead from the living, the sick from the well. It was hard to see from a short distance who was dead and who was not, so still and rigid and motionless did the natives lay in their terror.

Only their great staring eyes moved occasionally, following the white men with an appeal in them, wondering what this was that even the white men could not combat. The eyes of the sick shone like wet glass in the flickering lantern light, and the beaded sweat that trickled along bronzed skins twinkled like dew.

The task was not one for sober men, or for sane men. There was whisky on board. The officers drank whisky as they worked. The splash from the tiny grating by the port chains, as it dropped its burden into the sea, was almost monotonous. The warm water had the appearance of being woven out of golden bars and comets of fire, so highly phosphorescent was it, and so numerous the raging, darting sharks.

With the first flush of dawn the captain was taken sick, and he was dead before eight o'clock. They buried him from the bridge, the mate reading the service from a little black book, and the officers of the *Maloee* standing around cap in hand, staring with haggard eyes toward the horizon, wondering who would be next to occupy the flag-covered grating. The women were not informed of the event until it was over. The mate—he was captain now—wished to spare them as much as possible, for as long as possible.

Mary Brantly approached him after the service. Her color had faded, and her lips were set without a trace of the old gay smile.

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Age had come to her in a few hours, the ageless age that is not dependent on years. She had gone beyond fear, like the others, growing to be fatalist. It was not so much the thought of dying with terrifying speed that shook her, but the impotency of having to wait to receive the death-stroke, just wait, and able to do nothing.

"Is there any hope?" she asked quietly.

The mate drew her aside in the shelter of the chart-house where no one could see. He looked at her long and closely, bursting with savage pity and a sense of helplessness.

"You are a brave woman," he said at last, "and you have borne up wonderfully under it all. I suppose you can guess the truth. Unless the plague lets up we're all as good as buried. I don't know a thing about treating the disease, never had occasion to before, though I once saw a village depopulated with it. Most of the officers are resigned to their fate. I hardly think it will do any good to raise false hope for you to hold on to. Tomorrow I am going to send the sound people away in one of the boats. They can make a dash for land, where I imagine they'll stand a better chance."

His voice sank hopelessly and his head dropped. The woman reached up and fondled his coat lapel.

"I know you have done your best," she whispered.

The mate roused himself and caught her hands.

"I want you to know, Mary, that I've wanted you ever since I first saw you," he cried passionately. His voice faltered and he drew away. "I should never have told you but for the plague coming upon us. But whatever happens now you know. I daren't speak before because, well, because you are Mary Brantly of the Brantly Line and I am the chief officer of the *Maloee*, paid by the month to run one of your ships."

His voice trailed off bitterly. He released her hands and turned away.

"I am glad," whispered the woman.

She was carried out of herself. She had been expecting some such thing all during the voyage. That, perhaps, was why she chose to sail as passenger on board the *Maloee* with four hundred reeking natives as company. The mate had attracted her, his strong virile features, and his well-set body holding her in a sort of fascination. Her liking was purely physical.

The mate turned at her words and swept her suddenly to him. The long pent fires leaped through him in a searing flame, and he kissed her, kissed her again and again, the ardor of his passion driving from his mind all thought of the death ship. For a moment the woman lay passive, and her arms closed around him tightly. Then she struggled free. Not for long could the cold horror of her predicament go from her mind.

"I think you forget yourself," she said a little coldly, patting her hair into place. "This is no time to talk of love. You have your ship to look after."

The man looked at her for a moment, and then hopelessness swept over him again.

"That's true," he muttered, and gazed at the deck.

The mate's brain was burning with the thought that he had kissed her, felt her respond. She perhaps cared for him. But would she when the plague ceased, if ever, and their worlds returned to normal? He did not know. But he would do his best to find out, to check the plague, bring his ship to port. When he looked up the woman had gone, stealing silently away, thinking only of one thing, the plague.

THE scourge seemed to increase in fury, as if feeding on itself. The moist, warm weather aided it, as did the cramped living conditions of the natives. Before sunset on the third day one hundred and three of the ship's company, including natives, had gone by way of the grating, and as many more were sick. The fourth officer—he had been acting as third—was dead, as were the third, fifth, and sixth engineers. The chief was sick, and so was the dark-haired maid of Mary Brantly. Over a hundred natives were sick besides.

Of what few of the crew had remained faithful, five altogether, three were dead and the other two sick, and it had become a matter of absolute impossibility in the fearful heat of the stokehold for the second and fourth engineers and the donkeyman, all remaining out of the black gang, to keep up steam. The engines finally stopped.

The mate attempted at first to get some of the natives to go below and fire up, but in their utter indifference they submitted to curses and blows without a mutter or a movement. He gave up the task in the end, and with the aid of his two remaining deck officers and the engine-room staff he hauled the long unused sails from the

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forepeak down forward and, rigging them, hoisted them up the stays, one on the foretopmast stay, the other on the maintopmast stay. The big, triangular sails were awkward to handle, and the speed they gave to the *Maloee* was barely a knot and a half, just about steering way, but they were better than nothing and would eventually bring the ship to land.

After due consideration the mate altered the ship's course south, as the wind was by this change put on her quarter, and in that direction lay the Tonga Islands. It was his intention to anchor the ship in safety somewhere and then fight out the plague with a clean, sweet-smelling island to exercise on, fresh vegetables to eat, and good, clean, cold water to bathe in. There was no use sailing all over the Pacific, a floating coffin.

On the morning of the fourth day the *Maloee* lifted the palm-tops of a little island away on the port bow. The mate altered the course so as to come near it, but his heart sank when he observed it to be merely a mound of sand, scantily vegetated, and only partially protected from the swell by a low reef. He was about to motion to the helmsman to get back on his course again when he was called by the second mate to come below.

Descending wearily to the main deck, he found a surprizing change had taken place. Those of the natives who could do so were lined at the rail, gazing eagerly at the nearing land, pointing and chattering excitedly. They were weary with the long days of sea traverses and ached for the whisper of the wind through the palm-fronds. New life surging through them, they thronged around the mate and sought to be put ashore. They would fight the purple plague themselves; they did not need the white man. They were weary of the ship and of being confined between decks. If they had to die they would die on the coral sand and under the palms they knew and loved. The ship could come for them later on.

The mate considered. If he could get rid of the natives, there was a chance of the plague lessening. There was obviously nothing on the island on which so many as a hundred people could subsist, let alone the number of well natives there were. If there was water however, the provisions could be arranged. And it would be possible to send another ship to pick up the native survivors, if there were any. He knew the land was not part of the Tonga Islands, for his last sight showed him he was still some distance away. For himself, the other white men aboard, and especially the woman, he wanted to get where there were doctors and men who understood.

He dared not drop anchor, for if he did it would be well nigh impossible to raise the heavy iron hook again without the aid of steam. He ran the *Maloee* inshore as close as possible and sent the second mate off in a boat with half a dozen of the natives to see if the island had a good supply of water. They returned with the information that there were two ground springs that seemed to bubble freely, and the mate was content.

Half-wild with eagerness, the natives manned the boats and were landed, load by load, taking with them, the mate insisting, sufficient provisions to last for several weeks with care, and also the sick. He made a clean sweep of the ship, leaving only the white people aboard, landing the natives bag and baggage.

He could do nothing for them, and they would stand a better chance ashore. For humanity's sake he would send them any doctor who had courage enough to come, if he had a chance. Once the boats were hauled inboard, the slowly cruising *Maloee* headed south again and crawled out of sight of the seemingly rejuvenated natives, who already had cooking-fires going.

The island was barely out of sight when the chief engineer died and was immediately buried. He was followed scarce an hour afterward by the dark-haired maid of Mary Brantly, and she too, was slipped from the narrow grating into the tropic sea. The two deaths left aboard the *Maloee* just eleven persons all told, all of them white. Besides the three deck officers there were the three men of the engine-room staff, the chief steward and one assistant, two cooks, and the woman who owned the ship.

The mate had not seen her at all since those few moments on the bridge, when he had told her what she meant to him. She had remained in her cabin, having her meals brought in, making no attempt to aid the sick. She was not hysterical, nor did she make a show of her fears, but she might have been dead for all those aboard saw of her. She spent most of the time on her hot bunk, brooding over the foolish impulse, fascination of a man's face and figure, that

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had led her to make the voyage on the freighter.

She was too exhausted with gnawing terror for terror to take complete control of her. So she lay and thought and thought, and waited dumbly for the end, rather piqued that the mate had not been to see how she was getting on, forgetting that his duties kept him on his feet and on deck every minute of the day. It is no light task to navigate a steamship under staysails. The woman could hardly be blamed for her actions, or inactions. She was born to ease and comfort, and a plague ship is, anyway, no place for a delicate woman, though such, occasionally, prove heroic.

With no one now sick aboard the mate began to have hopes. And as the hours passed and no one showed any signs of getting sick, his hopes rose still higher. Perhaps the plague had worked itself out, or perhaps it was the natives alone it had feasted among.

Late afternoon brought a smudge of smoke low down on the southern horizon, and altering her course a trifle the *Maloee* sheered toward it, distress signals flying, and the plague flag at her truck.

Hardly had the smoke been sighted when the second mate was seized with giddiness and collapsed limply to the deck. It might have been over-excitement and lack of sleep for there were as yet none of the purple spots on his skin and none of the lumps under his arm-pits, but the mate, taking no chances, ordered him to his cabin right away. Also his hopes dropped and flickered well-nigh out, though his voice gave no sign and his face no hint of what he thought. As he was acting captain he had to set the example for those aboard. Responsibility is a great stiffener of the backbone.

THE smoke turned out to be from the stack of the freighter *Wassum*, bound from Aukland to Vancouver. She was a squat-bowed, rusty craft of some three thousand tons, laden with gum, wool and tallow. Also she happened to be registered for a few saloon passengers and carried a doctor. As soon as her watch officer observed the sail-rigged steamer bearing on his port beam and saw the distress and plague signals through his glasses, he altered the course and called his captain.

The two ships came abreast, about a mile apart, and the *Wassum* dropped a boat manned by the second mate. It came to just within easy hailing-distance and the officer stood up in the stern sheets and used his megaphone to the mate, who leaned from the window in the bridge wing.

"Ahoy there! What's the trouble?"

"Bubonic! Bu-ubonic!" the mate called back through his cupped hands. "This is the *Maloee*, bound Singapore to Papeete, general cargo, and four hundred natives. Plague started four days ago. Landed natives on island way back. Have you doctor on board?"

"Yes, I'll see him! How many cases on board now?

"Just one! Not sure whether he's got it. Got woman aboard. Must get rid of her."

"I'll see!" With a wave of his hand the officer lowered his megaphone, and the boat started back for the waiting *Wassum*.

Using his binoculars, the mate could see the gold-braided officers on the other ship's bridge regarding him intently. He saw the officer in the boat ascend the bridge companion and cross to the captain, standing a little apart from the others with a man who was evidently the ship's surgeon from the look of him, pointed of beard, brisk and alert. There were several minutes of thoughtful consideration. It was a weighty matter for the captain of the *Wassum* to consider. He could not afford to risk his own ship and the lives of his few passengers. Nor, on the other hand, could he, as a sailor, leave the *Maloee* entirely without aid of some sort. He rasped his chin as he thought and then asked the surgeon what he had to say.

The surgeon was not a coward. He had had experience with tropic diseases before. But he could not very well leave his own ship to give his time to the plague. He suggested the unaffected cases be carefully transhipped and isolated in the after-house of the *Wassum*, where he could live with them and watch them. A wireless would bring adequate assistance to the stricken freighter.

The captain considered a moment longer and then went down to see his passengers. It was a comfort they were all men, five of them, buyers for various Canadian firms. The captain put the case to them frankly. Would they take the risk? They looked at each other and then at the *Maloee*, wallowing in the swell away on the beam. It was the mention that there was a woman to be

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saved that decided them. They nodded, and the captain turned matters over to the surgeon.

The boat went dancing across the water to the *Maloee* again and again the megaphone came into use.

"Will take woman and unaffected men. Shall wireless Naval station to take charge of you. You lower boat, savvy"

"Yes!"

The mate waved to show he understood. The officer in the boat hesitated a moment, then: "You'd better open sea-cocks and let her sink! No good staying with infected man."

The mate shook his head and grinned a little.

"I'm staying with her. She's my first command, savvy? I don't aim to lose her." In spite of himself the young officer in the boat grinned back.

"All right! Good luck!" he shouted, and then the boat was heading back.

Neither man met afterward, but each remembered the other. It was one of those passing incidents of the sea, faces seen and passing, shipmates and fellow sailors spoken to and lost. Each remembered the other as a man worth knowing.

The mate turned to the group of men behind him and smiled a little sadly.

"Your chance," he said. "You all look fairly fit, except round the eyes, and I guess sleep'll put that all right. You, Mr. Travers," he turned to the third mate, "will see that the starboard accident boat is lowered, and will take charge of it. The rest of you—" his gaze swept the others; they were all there to the last steward and cook— "will follow Mr. Travers. Mr. Larkin, I should be glad if you would call Miss Brantly and inform her of the decision reached. I leave her in your charge."

The second engineer moved away without a word, and then a thought stopped him.

"And you, sir?" he said simply.

The others echoed his words.

"I'm staying here with the second mate and the ship. I expect to be able to work her to some port or the other, or beach her somewhere where she can be fumigated. I shall be all right."

"Then we'll stay with you, sir," they protested in a body, and it took the mate several minutes to dissuade them.

What use all to risk their lives? And there was the woman to be thought of. They filed off the bridge silently at the last, and dropped heavily, and still in silence, into the lowered accident boat.

From the bridge wing the mate watched, a lump clogging his throat. He did not expect to live. With the boat went his last hopes of life, so it seemed, if the second mate actually had the plague. There was a patter of shoes on the planking, a swish of skirts, and the mate swung round to face Mary Brantly, her face worn but flushed, her eyes shining with hope. All the fascination she had felt for the mate surged back into her with the promise of relief.

"Mr. Redmond, you are coming with us?"

He shook his head and with a frown turned away. She caught his arm and moved to face him.

"Listen, Harry," she said softly, and the mate tensed a little, "if you are thinking of the ship I wish you wouldn't. You have done your duty to me as the owner. I am content to have the ship sunk and you come with me. Mr. Larkin tells me they usually sink plague ships anyway. I can bear the loss, and no one can blame you. Come on and don't be foolish."

The mate shook off her arm a little angrily.

"You seem to have forgotten the second mate," he said roughly—

She frowned. She did not understand the queer pride that actuated men to stand by their fellows in time of crisis. She thought she was very practical and logical, which perhaps she was.

"But he is sick and can not recover. He will be dead before night. You must have the same chance as the others. Come along, Harry. Come along."

"I'm sorry, Mary, I can't."

A change came over her, and perhaps what was the true, impatient spirit leaped forth.

"Oh, if you think more of the ship and of the second mate than you do of me, very well."

Her eyes blazed and she stamped her foot in anger.

"I may pull through," remonstrated the mate mildly. "And if I did save myself I couldn't live peacefully afterward if I left the second to die alone. Don't you understand?"

"You don't love me then?"

"I do, I do, but I can't——"

"That's enough!"

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The second engineer's voice could be heard calling from the boat. They were waiting to push off.

"Coming, Mr. Larkin," she called back, and then, looking at the mate again. "At least Mr. Larkin is sincere."

She was gone like a flash, and the mate sighed as he turned away. He was not so sure that he cared for her now. Not only was she unreasonable, but she was selfish and inconsiderate of the ethics of matters.

The boat pushed off, and Mary Brantly, sitting very upright in the stern sheets just before the third mate, who was steering, caught sight of the mate's drawn face as he watched from the bridge. She leaned forward to Larkin, who swung the stroke oar.

"Why is it Mr. Redmond refuses to leave the ship?" she asked, with lifted eyebrows.

The second engineer hesitated, groping for words to express the why of the matter. "Oh, sort of a matter of honor, you know, for a skipper to stand by the bally packet till she drops."

"Honor?" The woman sneered a little, and her tiny fists clenched. She thought of the fine-looking face and well-set body she had lost. "A fantom honor!"

"Maybe," commented Larkin, somewhat curtly, and then bent to his rowing again.

The mate watched the boat draw alongside the *Wassum*. He saw the bearded surgeon motion for every one but himself to get off the deck, and then he lowered buckets of strong disinfectant with his own hands into the bobbing boat. Those in the boat were required to bathe themselves in the disinfectant, throw their clothes into the sea, and come aboard wrapped in a disinfectant drenched sheet. Because she was a woman the men considerately bathed first and went aboard up the swaying pilot-ladder, each wrapped in his sheet. When all was finished the weird-looking group was ushered aft by the surgeon and placed in the poop-house, barred off from the rest of the ship by heavy rope lines. The surgeon followed them and remained there. The boat was sunk by a firebar being dropped through its bottom. Then, with a few whistles of farewell, the ship's engines started, and she commenced her voyage to Vancouver, leaving the plague ship slowly sailing along over the calm sea.

FROM his head the mate took his shiny-peaked serge uniform cap, with the gold badge of the Brantly Line in the center above the peak. He held it in his hand and looked at it long and steadily. Just what he thought could hardly be put into words. The badge, the whole uniform, represented something that could hardly be defined. The master of a ship stayed with her for no logical reason. It was the custom, the unwritten law. Captains went down with their vessels, refusing to be saved; shot themselves in the moment of fatal collision, when all had been done that was possible. It was a strange code, unnameable and seldom spoken of, that actuated men. The officer in battle who would rather die than surrender, the leader who leads a cause lost before it is begun, the master mariner who dies with his hand still gripping the bridge-rail.

When Garibaldi gathered his army of ragged enthusiasts what did he offer them? Money, glory, food, land, power? Not at all. Honor, hardly. Or at least not a material honor, hardly an abstract honor, rather something between, perhaps a fantom honor, which should dwell in their own breasts and be recognized by their own kind only, the men who had won the same values. And the same impulse that had led his men to follow Garibaldi moved forces in the breast of the sea captain who went down with his ship, and in the mate who stood on the bridge of the freighter *Maloee*, reeking with plague, looking at the badge on his uniform cap and knowing that it stood for something greater than he, for the very game of Life itself which is greater than the men who play it. Mary Brantly did not understand. No woman understood. He sighed.

His meditation over he replaced his cap and went down below to attend to the sick man, having lashed the wheel so that the ship steered fairly well by herself.

SIX months later the general manager of the Brantly Line received a brief note of resignation from the former mate of the freighter *Maloee*. He did not understand, and his employer, Mary Brantly, did not explain what she thought she knew.

A cruiser had picked up the wandering freighter soon after the *Wassum* had wirelessed, and had piloted her to a lonely, sheltered islet where the mate had dropped

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anchor and waited with his sick companion, who had not died after all, until the specified time of quarantine was up. Then the cruiser had sent aboard her doctors and a house-cleaning, so to speak, had ensued. After that a loaned crew and Suva.

Mary Brantly and the mate went their separate ways and never met again. The sailor heard later that all those taken aboard the *Wassum* had survived and were scattered throughout the Pacific on various ships. The natives left on the isolated island were sent for by the Brantly Line and duly delivered to their homes, those of them who had lived through. The mate himself drifted east and entered the service of a famous Orient Line. He received no word of praise from Mary Brantly or from her general manager. His reward came a little after his first ship in the famous Orient Line.

It was in the Captain's Club in Singapore, where he had gone to be introduced. Grizzled old Captain Marks, commodore of the Line, singled him out and shook hands before the assembled master-mariners, saying heartily:

"Heard about the *Maloee* affair. Good work, son, good work."

That was all. But the new captain noted the heads that nodded in agreement, and he knew that he had won his spurs in the eyes of men who had done likewise.

# Red Autumn

## A Five-Part Story Part II

## By HUGH PENDEXTER

*Author of "Tameless Days," "Long Rifles," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.***

WHEN the United States declared war against Great Britain in June, 1812, I was despatched on a keelboat expedition to carry the news to Manuel Lisa—"Mr. Manuel"—founder of the Missouri Fur Company, who was trading with the Indians along the upper Missouri River. Speed was imperative, for if word should come to the hostile Sioux from Canada first, Mr. Manuel would be trapped. For a year past, British agents had been urging the nations of the upper region to join Tecumseh's great confederacy; and with the exception of one or two tribes, they were in an ugly mood.

The same special knowledge of Indian conditions, especially among the Mandan tribe, that had earned me the nickname of "Mandan" Ramsay resulted in my appointment as *bourgeois*, or head, of the expedition sent to warn Mr. Manuel. Other members were the rough-and-tumble American hunters Richardson, Lang, Long, Belter and James; Michael Lachapel, the *patron* or sailing-master of our keelboat; Leme, his assistant or *bosseman;* and a crew of some twenty *voyageurs;* all the latter being New Orleans creoles. Among the crew was an eccentric known as Le Fou (the Fool), who smuggled himself on board our keelboat, and when discovered begged to be allowed to accompany us in order to search for his "noble protector, the man from Balise." At last we consented, though with some misgivings.

Our start was made from St. Louis. At Fort Osage the Indian agent gave us a description of an Omaha who had stolen a blanket infected with

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smallpox, and asked us to kill him at sight in order to prevent the spread of the disease, most appalling scourge from which the Indians suffered. We accomplished this mission a few days later.

Near Sun Island a famished stranger walked into camp. To the joy of Le Fou, it proved to be his "noble protector, the man from Balise." Beyond admitting that he had had to run away from lower Louisiana, and that, having wet his powder, he was helpless in the wilderness, he would tell us nothing of himself. However, he persuaded me to take him on as a hunter with the understanding that when we reached Mr. Manuel it was to be left to the latter to say whether Balise should draw wages or not.

A few days later Balise justified his title of Le Fou's protector by saving the half-wit from drowning; though Balise would have lost his own life in the attempt had it not been for the giant hunter Richardson.

That same day, however, the hunter James rolled overboard and was drowned. When his body was found the head bore a contusion which might have been the result of striking a rock in the stream. Or, as one of the Americans further suggested, the body might have been discovered by an Arikara who clubbed it to make sure of the man's death. There was some ground for thinking that this tribe was unfriendly in view of that fact that an Arikara arrow had streaked past my head only a little while before.

Next morning as we were breaking camp we were visited by a one-eyed Indian who bore a tame crow on his shoulder. He said that his name was Medicine Crow and that he was of the Yankton Dakotas. Crow warned us against the Arikaras and asked us to take him past their villages. We were just getting friendly when he suddenly flew into a rage, accused us of robbing a near-by burial lodge and departed. It turned out that the Yankton had seen a calumet which Le Fou, unbeknownst to us, had stolen from the dead man—an awful sacrilege in Indian eyes.

A few miles farther on the hunter Lang went overboard and came up swearing that he had been pushed in on purpose. For the first time the charge was made that Le Fou was trying to murder the Americans and was being abetted by Balise. There was also a suspicious circumstance in the fact that that evening I narrowly escaped being brained by a Sioux war-club—and that Le Fou might have done it. Possibly Le Fou was hiding some sinister design behind a mask of half-wittedness!

Now we came to the camp of the Sleeper, a mystery man of the Teton Dakota. To him we made a present of a fine bull buffalo that we had the luck to shoot near by. Before the Indians could eat any of the meat, however, I discovered that it had been treated with arsenic. Some one of our band had done that. I got the Indians to abandon their feast on the ground that the meat was "medicine," and therefore not to be eaten.

Before I could finish investigating the source of the arsenic, Le Fou disappeared, and Balse, his "protector," went off to look for him. News came that Le Fou had joined with the Sleeper, who considered him "touched," and therefore *wakan*, or sacred.

While passing White Lime and White Paint Creeks we saw several smokes—signal smokes apparently—on both sides of the river. That night a volley of ten or a dozen shots was discharged at us. As the firing ceased—as we thought—there came a single shot that brought us to our toes.

"THAT wa'n't no old smooth-bore trade musket!" snapped Belter.

"A long rifle," muttered Richardson, glaring at the dark bank. "I know its voice, too."

"Balise's rifle, for a pack of beaver!" cried Lang.

"Then he's been killed or captured, and an Indian has his gun," I said.

"Mebbe yes, mebbe no," grunted Richardson.

We did not answer the fire but stood guard till two o'clock in the morning to repel an attack. We were not disturbed, and were off with the first light.

At Ponca River a half-starved Ponca Indian crept up to our fires and threw himself on our mercy. We fed him and gave him some tobacco and an old blanket. He said that the Sioux were overrunning the country and making new medicines and that the young men were purifying their weapons to make them *wakan* and were boasting of the American scalps they would dance.

Richardson began howling *Les Chevelures*, and the Ponca would have bolted if the men had not seized him. I ordered the hunter to desist and finally succeeded in quieting the poor wretch's fears. He told me he had escaped from a war-band after hearing the scalp-song.

The leader of this band carried a flag. I drew a picture of the American flag, and he promptly shook his head and gave me to understand that it was such a flag as the Hudson's Bay Company's men were furnishing to the upper tribes.

The Sleeper, so far as he knew, was not identified with these hostile demonstrations; nor had he seen any white men in the camp during the two days he had been held prisoner. On the night of his escape, however, a man had come in, carrying a crow on his shoulder. The band seemed to stand in great awe of this fellow, who fiercely harangued them.

He told them the Americans were robbing death-lodges and were even shooting down the Omahas. We had killed an Omaha, the thief with the smallpox blanket. But that had happened far down the river. For Medicine Crow to know it meant that Le Fou had told him, as there had been no

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red witnesses to the man's death. I questioned him sharply, striving to learn something of Le Fou or Balise, but the Ponca persisted that Medicine Crow was alone when he entered the camp.

"He was telling the Sioux that the Master of Life had given him a medicine that would kill any man he turned it against, a new medicine never owned by an Indian before, when I crawled away," explained the Ponca.

Richardson took a turn at examining the man, and after he had finished he told me:

"Just one thing's sartain. Medicine Crow is a new Injun to these parts. Claims to be Sioux, but he don't meet no bands that ever knew him. He's stirring up more —— than Lisa can squelch in a year of Sundays."

I began to entertain the same fear.

On the next day we sighted three lodges of Sioux. The Ponca was badly frightened and begged us to set him ashore on the opposite side. Lachapel growled at making the crossing but did as requested, and our guest leaped ashore and vanished from sight before we could wish him luck.

We recrossed the river and were holding well out from the lodges when to my delight a white man came down to the bank and waved his hand. We turned inshore, and I was rejoiced to behold Michael Immell, one of Mr. Manuel's right hand men, and one of the most courageous and intelligent of the early traders.

He was as large as, if not larger than, Richardson, and was a man absolutely without fear. This has been said of many men and often is untrue. For there are men who will face death without a quiver today and who will run from danger tomorrow, and who can never explain it even to themselves. But Immell was constitutionally incapable of feeling fear. He took no pride in it, and once told Mr. Manuel that it was nothing to his credit as he was "born that way."

I shall always remember the day in early Summer of 1823, when we received word that he had been hacked to pieces by the Blackfeet, how General Clark remarked—

"Well, he must have taken a rare lot of them with him."

About ninety per cent. of my worries dropped from me as I clasped his big hand. He had just traded for forty beaver, a few otter and some bladders of tallow, and was in a prime good humor. Having finished his trade, he proposed to travel with us some twenty miles to the trading-house Mr. Manuel had laid out for Louis Bissonet—we called him Bijou—who was to handle the Yankton Dakota trade.

No war news had come up the river; and when I told him we were in arms against Great Britain he did not seem to be much disturbed and remarked that it was a matter for Mr. Manuel to worry about. Yet he was frank to admit that the Indians were in a bad mood, uneasy under the continual prodding of the Canadian traders.

Thus far the influence of the Canadian northmen had resulted in the Sioux sending war parties against the Mandans and the Arikaras, and in the Minnetarees raiding the Arikaras. As the Sioux were on the edge of carrying the fight to all American traders Immell believed that all the other tribes would join with them in order to escape from further intertribal hostilities.

"Sioux got to be stopped, or all the Injuns they're now raiding will smoke war-tobacco against us," he said in finishing his remarks.

We were sorry to lose Immell as his presence gave us all a world of confidence. We were seven days in making the Cheyenne River, having sighted several bands of Indians on the banks who signaled for us to come ashore. To avoid being fired upon we kept much to the middle of the river, sacrificing speed for safety. Several nights we made dark camps. The Cheyenne was very low, and after putting the hunters ashore to chase some buffalo we cordelled four miles farther and camped by some bluffs.

It was here that we got the first taste of fighting. Long and Belter had come in with all the buffalo meat they could stagger under and we had started the kettles when we heard guns firing back of the bluffs. Leme, the *bosseman*, scrambled up the slope and no sooner reached the top than he began waving his arms excitedly.

Taking the other two hunters, I secured my blunderbuss and hastened to the heights. Lang and Richardson were running toward us and running for their very lives. Behind them raced a crescent of horsemen, yelping and yowling as the warriors endeavored to throw a circle around the two men.

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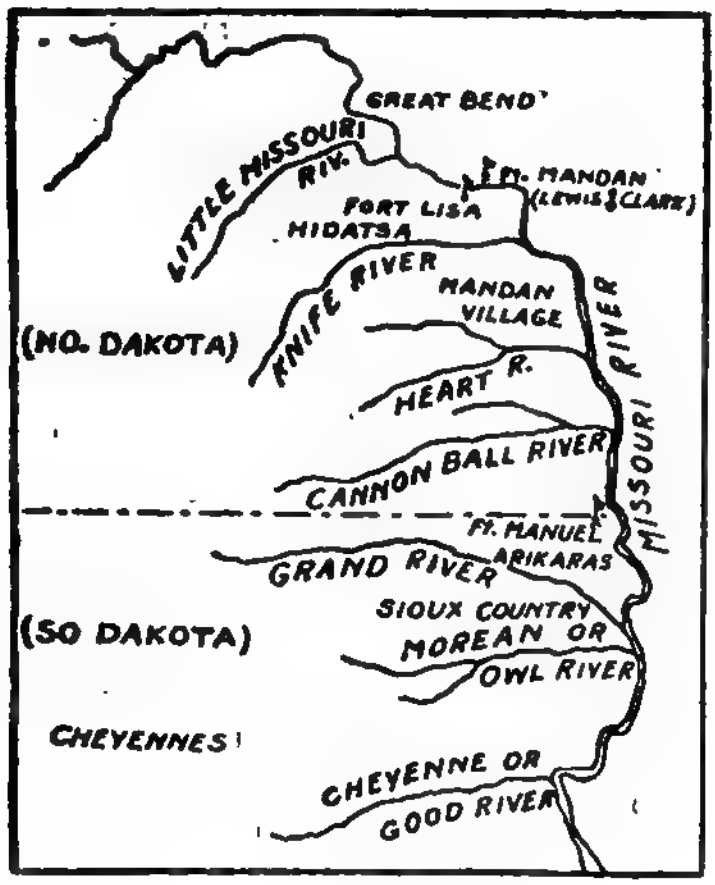


The Indians feared the long rifles, however, and the long line was equidistant from the hunters at every point. As we watched, Richardson raised his rifle and fired, and a horse went down. A man dismounted was almost as good as a man severely wounded, for the red men had poor stomachs for drawing close while afoot.

Richardson reloaded as he ran, and then Lang fired. A horse reared and bolted madly from the curved line. When a gun was pointed the savages would vanish over the sides of their mounts, and the two hunters were not wasting any lead. They were content with hitting a horse.

Belter took careful aim and fired at the man on the left of the line. The horse went down on his knees, hurling the rider over his head. The man was up like a cat and running back out of range. Long spoiled the right arm of the head man on the right.

Richardson and Lang flourished their hands in greeting and resumed their shooting, one of them always withholding his fire until the other had reloaded. Some of the Indians had trade muskets, but it was the bowmen whom the hunters watched the more closely.

Richardson suddenly flung up his arms and went down. Lang dropped his rifle and attempted to lift him up. With a terrific whoop of triumph the savages flogged their horses toward the two.

Then Lang jumped to his rifle and Richardson fired from the ground, knocking from his horse a man whose elaborate headdress proclaimed him to have carried the pipe on more than one successful war-path. The moment he fired the big hunter was up and running as nimbly as ever.

"By ——! He out-Injuned 'em!" screamed Belter.

And there was no denying that the trick had been most smoothly worked; and it was astonishing to observe the Indians' celerity in racing on all sides to long rifle-range.

The turning movement was renewed, and I feared that my hunters would be caught in a galloping circle, when they would be fired upon from all sides and killed before our eyes. I shouted to Lachapel to send up the boatmen to make a show of numbers, while Belter and Long fired as rapidly as they could load.

When the heads of the frightened creoles appeared above the top of the bluff I discharged the blunderbuss. The creoles screamed; the enemy wheeled and galloped madly away. They carried the dead man with them, two of them leaning down as they dashed by on each side of him and scooping him up in a very adroit manner.

"You out-Injuned 'em, you old whelp!" howled Belter as Richardson and Lang came panting up to us.

Richardson grinned and tried to reach his left shoulder.

"Arrer-head in there somewheres. Cut her out!" he puffed.

According to the red custom the head of the war arrow was loosely attached to the shaft, and when Richardson was hit and attempted to pull it out he brought only the shaft away. Swearing loudly in admiration over the trick his friend had played on the savages, Belter whipped out his skinning-knife and made an incision sufficient to permit the removal of the head.

Richardson, short of breath from his long run, began to give the details of the fight while Belter was practising the rude surgery. It was the loss of the meat and not the wound that irritated Richardson. He and Long had shot two cows and were cutting them up when the Indians dashed from a fringe of willows along a tiny creek and made for them. As there had been



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more than a score of the enemy Richardson believed that it was the blunderbuss which had scared them away, they mistaking it for a swivel.

WE IMMEDIATELY shifted our camp to the other side of the river, and although there was small danger of any Indians making the crossing during the night we doubled the sentries. It began raining toward morning, and we set out in a heavy storm. We could progress only by cordelling; and yet so great was the fear of the creoles that despite the storm we covered eighteen miles before tying up.

There followed three days more of constant alarms, but of no actual danger. Then we passed Grand River, and the crew breathed in relief. Immell had told the men that Mr. Manuel had intended to build his fort near the Grand; so at every bend we expected to behold the new post. The day passed, and we went into camp a dozen miles below the first Arikara village without finding the outfit. The men were disheartened.

Next morning I gave them all a dash of rum to bolster up their courage, and as the wind favored and they were spared the exertion of cordelling, and the dread of being jumped and scalped as they wallowed along the shore and fought to carry the line through the small willows, their depression lifted. Surely this day we would overtake Mr. Manuel, each one of us told himself.

The *patron* started the song, and once more they roared out the childish ditty about the three ducks in the pond behind the house, about the prince and the shepherdess. At midday we arrived at an Arikara fort and worked inshore. The bank was soon filled with a curious crowd of women and children.

The men held aloof until Le Gauche, the Left-Handed, principal chief of the Arikaras and a very fine-looking man, came down to the boat to talk with us. The first thing he did was to station a guard of warriors to prevent pilfering. He and I had met several times before, and he was quite amiable.

The Sioux, he told me, were bad people and were taking Arikara scalps. Mr. Manuel must stop them, he insisted, or his people would decide they must accept the aid of the British traders. In other words the Arikaras would join the Sioux if the British traders brought about peace, and would work to exterminate the Americans.

"Our white chief will make the Sioux keep away from your villages. He will take a pipe from you to them and they will smoke it," I assured him.

He had another complaint: The village was vastly displeased because Mr. Manuel had not built his post nearer it. La Plume, chief of the second village, had agreed with Le Gauche that the post should be erected at the third point, or bend, above the first village. Mr. Manuel had refused to build there and had proceeded farther up the river. Le Gauche insisted that he was our brother but could not answer for his people; but he did believe that a liberal distribution of gifts would soften their hearts.

The upper tribes were always arbitrary in deciding where a trader could build his post, and the fact that Mr. Manuel had refused the site selected for him told me that the spot was unsuitable.

As to covering their wounded hearts with gifts, that was out of the question. Once a man began heeding such red advice he would be plucked to his shirt.

I told the chief that I would no longer be the *bourgeois* once I came in sight of my employer and that under no conditions would I give any presents. As to his people joining the Sioux they could do as they pleased, but those who did not think like little children must know that the Sioux would knock them all in the heads after using them in attacking the Americans.

But he was not yet through with fault-finding and warnings. He said—and this I later learned to be a fact—that two of the chiefs, including La Plume, were very angry at having not received their gifts from the United States Government. He, Le Gauche, had been given his presents by Mr. Manuel, but the others had been overlooked.

I replied that this was a matter for Mr. Manuel to adjust. In fact, Mr. Manuel had remedied the error before deciding on the site for his post. But Le Gauche did not inform me of this, thinking that I might give away the company's goods because of a half-truth.

The chief was displeased with my stubbornness and did not ask me to the village

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to eat. In turn I did not invite him to come aboard and have a dram. He left us abruptly. Soon after he disappeared among the lodges the guard he had posted withdrew, and a warrior shouted for the women and children to withdraw from the bank and boat. This was a very bad sign, being equivalent to ordering noncombatants out of the way so that the fighting might commence. As there were twelve hundred souls in the village we would have stood no chance to escape had they rushed us.

The attack did not materialize, however, and the *patron* hurriedly worked the boat out into the stream. Then Le Gauche returned, coming down to the river on the run, and crying out for us not to leave a friendly village in that fashion, and promising us complete protection if we would return to the shore.

I had no doubt that he meant all he said and that some hot-headed young warrior had called to the women and children. However, that was something for him to explain to Mr. Manuel and not to me; and, having secured a good start without being fired upon, the creoles were eager to proceed, and they put their hearts into the work and walked us up the river very rapidly.

We refused to land at the second village, four miles above the first, although urged to do so. Now that we were so near the end of the long journey we would take no chances. We kept well out in the river until darkness made it unsafe and then crossed and camped on the opposite shore and did without fires.

With the first light, and scarcely pausing to eat, we were fighting the current again. By eight o'clock that morning we came to a beautiful prairie bluff with fine timber scattered through the bottoms. And the first man I recognized on the river-bank was Mr. Manuel.

THE men behind him fired a volley in greeting, and we emptied all our guns as the boat nosed into the landing. The creoles wept and danced in their great joy. The hunters grinned and jerked nods to old comrades. Mr. Manuel leaped on board and seized both my hands and dragged me to the bank and to one side, and cried in Spanish:

"How is it, my young friend, you come to me when you would not come with me? And in a company boat?"

"Then you have not received my message from the Sleeper?"

He shook his head and puckered his brows.

"We have declared war on Great Britain!" I exploded. "I have come to bring you the word so you would not be taken off your guard."

He grasped my arm in a tight grip and stared out on the river for half a minute. But his voice was low and calm when he finally said:

"I knew it was coming. In the Sioux villages and among the Minnetarees and the Mandans the Canadian traders have men who spend more time in stirring up trouble between the tribes and the United States than they do in trading for robes and beaver.

"And so it has come at last! My young friend, we must work very hard. Only yesterday I was wondering what the world was doing. The Arikaras have been telling me about a new medicine-man who is working among the Sioux and is passing war-tobacco to be smoked against us. I am sure this medicine-man is sent by Tecumseh."

"What can we do?" I asked, for the odds appeared to be hopelessly against us.

Our creoles didn't count, and of Americans we were but a handful.

"We must follow the plan I made a year ago when I saw we must fight either the French or the English. If I can get the Sioux and Arikaras to stop killing each other and smoke together I can keep them from joining the British.

"You must go to the Minnetarees and get them to smoke an Arikara pipe and stop raiding the lower villages. The Arikaras want peace. Only last night a Minnetaree sneaked into one of their lodges within pistol-shot of this post and killed and scalped a man.

"The Mandans are friendly to us and only ask to be left alone. If the Sioux keep sending war-parties against them they may accept Tecumseh's tobacco so as to be protected by the British.

"The Minnetarees are divided already, the British-lovers following Le Borgne, the Blind. Le Borgne's rivals incline toward us, not that they like Americans, but because they are jealous of Le Borgne and want to see him fail in leadership. You must stir them up against Le Borgne, as

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there is no chance of winning him over. Now we'll go to the fort, and you shall tell me what has happened on the way up the river."

It was September twenty-fourth, a fine, warm day; and if not for the horrible tribal wars one could not ask for a more gracious land. The post looked to be completed except for the stockade, and men were cutting timbers for this and also hauling rock for the chimneys. The blacksmith shop, the store and a provision-house were finished, and the season's hay was made.

To a superficial observer the situation at the fort was badly tangled. The tribes were fighting each other and committing their murders within shouting distance of the fort, but as yet none had attacked the outfit.

I saw a band of Arikaras who had brought in corn to trade, and close by them was a band of Sioux come to induce Mr. Manuel to build a post in their country. They met at the fort without displaying any rancor toward each other but would be at each other's throats once they were a short distance away.

Our progress was halted by Nez de Corbeau (Raven Nose) chief of the Yantonai, one of the most intelligent of his people and a most worthy man. He was glad to see me again, but lost little time in greetings. Pointing to where some fifty of his warriors were feasting, he warned Mr. Manuel:

"There are bad voices in the air. Let my white brother cross the Arikaras to the other shore and refuse to cross any of my children. Blood will run if my children catch the Arikaras outside the fort."

"They shall be crossed after dark unseen by your children," replied Mr. Manuel.

This ferrying different bands of Indians across the river to keep them from tearing out each other's throats was a regular part of a day's work and added much arduous labor.

Mr. Manuel was preoccupied as we walked along.

"We are short-handed," he abruptly informed me. "If you had come a day earlier I would have had eighteen more men. Early yesterday Charles Sanguinette and two men started for the Spanish Waters to trade with the Arapahoes. Louis Lorimier and four men started for Wind River* and Reuben Lewis, two *engagés* and some trappers set out for the Little Bighorn. Your coming is timely, and the hunters are sorely needed as riflemen if we have trouble; but I wish you had arrived a day or so earlier with your news. Then I would have held the men here."

"Send my hunters after them and bring them back," I counseled.

But he shook his head and explained:

"That would tell the Indians we are afraid, and it would scare the men. If we win it won't be by numbers but a show of confidence. Our house trade has been good. Yesterday I traded for thirty-six packs; but I'm crippled for need of horses: The Minnetarees alone have stolen twenty-six, and Le Borgne refuses to give any of them up. I've had to buy horses of the one-eyed villain to replace those his Big Bellies† stole."

We were now at the fort, and Mr. Manuel led the way through the store to a small room he used for a sleeping-quarters and a private office. He set out the whisky and some hard bread and nodded for me to talk. I omitted the routine happenings of the journey and confined my narrative largely to Balise, Le Fou, Medicine Crow, the death of James and the suspicions of the hunters.

When I finished he pursed his lips, slowly shook his head and muttered:

"That is all very bad. That arsenic may cause more trouble than the smallpox blanket. If a medicine-man gets to using the poison then almost anything may happen. If possible it must be found and destroyed. It would have been much safer for us Americans up here if you had tied rocks to those two men and dropped them over the stern."

"I can see that now," I admitted. "Balise tricked us, I'm sure. And I'm afraid Le Fou isn't so much of a fool as I believed."

"It is also to be regretted that you didn't kill the man with the tame crow. All the tribes are much worked up by him. They look on him as a red savior. He brings them new medicine and dances and pretends to work strong magic. I wish he would come to the fort."

"I'm sorry I didn't kill him," I regretted. "But at first I thought he was a Sioux."

"He brings a talk and war-tobacco from

*Big-horn.

†*Gros Ventres*, name bestowed by the French, and entirely unwarranted by their physical appearance.

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the upper-Mississippi Indians. It would be much better for the United States if he had died down-river— Ah, some one has hurts to be covered."

The last was prompted by the sound of wailing in the store. We stepped out and found Le Gros, an Arikara chief, and his wife. They had come to mourn the death of their child. Mr. Manuel, according to custom, covered the dead with some gifts, and the couple withdrew.

Big Man, as we Americans called him, was a most ferocious-looking fellow and as large a man as Immell or Richardson. His fierce countenance would cause a *mangeur de lard* to shake with fear; and yet he was always loyal to us and a thoroughly reliable man. We returned to the little office, and Mr. Manuel bruskly announced:

"I've been thinking about things while covering the dead. The sooner you go to the Minnetarees the better. Medicine Crow will go there to strengthen Le Borgne. You must reach the Knife River villages ahead of the medicine-man. You can make your first stop with the Mandans, your old friends.

"There will be a great risk, but that's what we are up here for. You must be very bold. You will find the British flag flying in the villages. You must demand that it be lowered and the United States flag raised. While you are gone I shall be kicking the Canadian traders out of the Sioux villages. I shall try to stop the new medicine-man from reaching the Knife."

"I will start tomorrow," I told him. "The creoles can take me up and leave me. I will return by dugout or by horse."

"That is the way a man should talk. How many men do you want?"

I knew he must be very sparing of his men, for the Fall trade must be carried on in the midst of tribal wars and British intrigue, and the outfits already sent away had left him short-handed. Did he cease trading activities and shut himself up in the post the Indians would promptly decide that he was frightened and that the United States was a puny power. But if he had had many men I should have made the same reply, which was—

"One man."

This met with his approval.

"Pick out your man, but don't take Lachapel," he directed. "I shall be sending him back to St. Louis with a boatload of furs soon."

We went outside, where my hunters, already warmed with several drinks, were regaling old comrades with their "histories*" of the trip. Richardson was lying most outrageously, his three companions solemnly vouching for every word he uttered. On beholding me, he grinned in embarrassment and tugged his beard. I called the four hunters to one side and informed them:

"I'm off tomorrow morning for the Minnetaree village. It will be no pleasure trip. I shall take one man with me. Whom shall I take?"

Almost as soon as I had put the question Richardson stepped to my side and roared—

"Me!"

"Then that's settled. Drink what rum you must have today, for we take none with us."

Belter, Lang, and Long indignantly broke in with a dozen reasons why each one of them should be my choice. They denounced the grinning Richardson for a drunken, untrustworthy dog. I endeavored to appease them by promising:

"You who stay here will get a belly full of fighting. Mr. Manuel will tell you the same." And Richardson leered at them and hoarsely sang *Les Chevelures*.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ROAD TO THE FLAG

THE Arikaras made a pretense of intending to remain all night at the fort and were crossed by the *voyageurs* in the evening. The Sioux were drinking whisky heavily diluted with water, and knew nothing of the Arikaras' departure until the boatmen returned. Then they clamored to be set across; but Mr. Manuel, remembering Raven Nose's warning, told them his men were too tired.

The Sioux became ugly and sullenly retired a short distance from the fort. Several large fires were built within easy swivel range of the post, and the guards were doubled. We did not seriously fear an attack from the Sioux as Raven Nose would hold them in check unless they got too much whisky or happened upon some stragglers out of sight of the post. The band's retirement furnished Mr. Manuel

*Early river term for exaggerated account of a man s experiences.

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with an excellent excuse for cutting off the liquor, and he took me to the store-house and directed a clerk to get about assembling the equipment I was to take to the Mandan and Minnetaree villages.

We were occupied in making up the trade goods when Richardson, very drunk, came in. That is, he should have been helplessly drunk from the amount of rum he had imbibed; but there was no intoxication in his gait or talk as he swaggered up to us and grinned broadly on beholding the heaps of cloth and beads and other merchandise.

With the cheek of an American hunter he bruskly told Mr. Manuel:

"Put it all back, *bourgeois*. We can't ever carry it."

And he made a wide sweep of his hand toward the equipment.

Mr. Manuel suspended work and waited. He knew Richardson. The tall hunter seated himself on a bale of strouding, pulled at his beard and informed us:

"Just come from the creoles. They're scared as —— of the Injuns, specially them Sioux with old Raven Nose. It'll take ten days for them to work the boat up to the Big Knife even if they make extry good time. And they'll kerflummox and go to pieces before we make our first camp."

"They'll do as they're told," said Mr. Manuel in Spanish.

I repeated it in English so that Richardson could understand. The hunter threw out his hand, fingers extended, in the sign language of "nothing," and said—

"I ain't 'fraid of Injuns, but I don't hanker to set out with a parcel of scared pork-eaters."

"Not getting faint-hearted because a few Sioux are sulking outside the post?" asked Mr. Manuel.

Richardson's eyes half-closed, and his voice was thick with passion as he replied—

"*Bourgeois*, that's a poor pipe to give me to smoke."

"There, there, Richardson. No one doubts your courage."

I repeated it, added a few words of my own, and the hunter came out of his black mood. He told us:

"I'm going to make the Knife if I have to go alone. Give us three hosses, and Mandan Ramsay and me will make it overland in four or five days. The war-parties will hang to the river. If they're up to mischief the most of them are chasing the outfits that went out yesterday. Mandan Ramsay and me can go through like a wolf sneaking round a herd of cows."

Mr. Manuel knitted his brows, stared at me and waited for me to declare my views. Richardson was not afraid of anything, and his common sense was great even when in drink. He knew the country thoroughly on both sides of the river. I was weary of boat travel and had no relish to be dependent on a crew that would go to pieces every time a savage hooted at us from a bluff. Horses were scarce, and yet my errand was very important.

"It's for you to decide, *bourgeois*," I said. "We will obey orders. But Richardson is right. With two riding animals and one for packing we stand a much better chance of getting through."

"If you go with a light trade the Minnetarees will think we are very poor and will laugh at you," he mused.

"Not if I say a boat is coming up the river very soon. Give us the horses and we'll get through."

"Is there any hosses across?" asked Richardson.

"There are some the hay-cutters were using. They were to bring them to the post tomorrow. The men do not like to stay over there guarding them.

"You shall go overland. But you must buy me some horses and send them down as soon as you can. They should be brought down on this side. We will make up a small equipment for the pack-horse."

This he told us in broken English and villainous French. Then in Spanish he said to me:

"I will put in several flags. Be sure you use them. You will find flags flying that the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies gave the Indians. Those flags must come down and ours run up; or the Indians will think we are very weak."

"We will do our best," I assured him.

Shortly after midnight Lachapel and Leme ferried us across without the Sioux learning of our departure. Nez de Corbeau, or Raven Nose, would do all in his power to hold his followers in check, but there would be no holding them should they happen upon us at any distance from the post. Already they were convinced that we had robbed them of Arikara victims, and they would nurse their grievance as an excuse for murdering us.

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We found the horse-guard near the river, very wide awake and very nervous. They had heard the yelling of the Sioux and had been imagining all sorts of evil. We selected and saddled two good animals and packed our equipment on a third.

Richardson was intimately acquainted with the country between the Arikara villages and the Mandan country, and as we traveled north I would find myself equally as well at home. So the dark night bothered us but little. As our purpose was to get clear of Raven Nose's band we were content with making eight miles, when we camped and slept until sunrise.

With the return of daylight we deemed it necessary to keep to ravines as much as possible to escape being seen by wandering bands of Sioux. Our course was almost due north, and we kept within five or six miles of the river and always sighted it when compelled to pass over any considerable elevation. At late afternoon we planned to camp on a small creek within a mile of the river and rest our horses, but a smoke to the west drove us on to a less exposed spot.

Early next morning and before we had started our small fire twenty savages disturbed our peace of mind by suddenly debouching from a ravine within a quarter of a mile. Fortunately they were traveling south, and we had only to wait for them to pass from sight. We believed that they were eager to reach the Arikara villages, where they could lie in wait and waylay a victim, for they had no scouts on the flank and were riding at a gallop. Undoubtedly their camp had been dangerously close to ours, for their ponies were fresh. Having no desire to be caught close to the river and hemmed in on the bluffs, we ate our breakfast and traveled deeper into the interior.

At noon we halted in a tiny valley, and Richardson shot a deer. We had hoped to make the Cannon Ball some time that night; and each mile traveled north decreased, as we believed, the danger from the Sioux. We rode more boldly and rapidly after the midday halt.

Now we began to come upon scattered herds of buffaloes until we were surrounded by the shaggy patches. Between the herds and especially close to the cows padded the hungry wolves. The bulls on the flanks insured safety for the cows and their young so long as they did not stray. Richardson declared he must have marrow-bones for supper; but I restrained him until near sundown when we came in sight of the valley of the Cannon Ball, lined by ranges of low hills as far as the eye could reach, those far in the west dwindling to mere dots.

Richardson would be denied no longer. He dismounted in a hollow and began working toward a small herd. I rode up the slope to view the country in the south, and after one glance was softly calling to my companion to come back.

Disgruntled at being interrupted, he joined me; and I pointed to herd of several hundred buffaloes galloping north and at a distance of about half a mile. As the herd tore along they spread alarm to other herds; and by the time the van of the huge creatures was abreast of our position the whole western landscape appeared to be in motion.

"Indians scared them; probably chasing them. Your hunting must wait," I said as the rumble of the pounding hoofs swept over us like heavy thunder.

"Bah! You know, Mandan, them critters will run twenty miles if they're scared. If Injuns set them going it prob'ly happened miles and miles south of here."

I knew this to be true, that a stampeded herd will run anywhere from five to a score of miles; yet I insisted that he refrain from discharging his rifle. After ten minutes of waiting, of sullen impatience on his part, I touched his arm and pointed south. He already had seen it—a string of dots passing over a rise; horsemen traveling in the same direction as the buffaloes.

"Mandan Ramsay, your medicine is *wakan*," he conceded. "Still I don't think they'd 'a' heard my shot with all the rumpus them buffaloes was kicking up. We'll drop down to one of them groves where we can have cover and water. If they go into camp on the river we must sneak away."

WE URGED our weary animals into the mile-wide valley and made the river. The water was very muddy, but shallow and only a hundred and fifty yards wide.

We crossed without trouble and went into camp in a grove of cottonwoods. North of us was a magnificent stretch of open country, where the grass stood three

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feet high. Hobbling the animals, we worked among the trees to the west and watched for the Indians.

At last they came across the river-bottom, weaving in and out among the small groves until they came to the bank of the river a short distance west of our position. We were hoping that they would continue on after the buffaloes; but the chase did not interest them to that extent, and they proceeded to go into camp.

I told Richardson that we must get back to our horses and make a night ride across the open country. He gave me no heed, but continued staring intently at the savages. I counted thirty of them and asked him how many he made of them. He shook his head impatiently and muttered—

"Watch that cuss wearing buffalo horns like a Assiniboin."

The sun was slipping over the western rim; but the light held good, and I quickly picked out the warrior he was referring to. There was nothing in his appearance that was unusual, not even his strange headdress; for buffalo horns were not characteristic of any one tribe. The Indian looked like his companions; and, saying as much, I again urged an immediate withdrawal.

"Wait a minute," Richardson said. "He's throwing off his robe. Now take a good squint. What about them legs? Injun legs?"

Except for a breech-cloth the fellow stood naked. His thin legs were ridiculously bowed.

"Le Fou!" I whispered.

"No one else! I'd know them bandy legs among a million. Puts on the airs of war chief."

And he cocked his rifle.

"No, no!" I exclaimed, seizing his hand.

"But he oughter die!" snarled Richardson.

"True enough. Some time he shall. But our horses are tired. We're in no shape for a race. The pack-animal holds us back. Even if you could fetch him at this range it would only bring the whole pack down on us, and our hair would be in the smoke inside of an hour."

Le Fou passed behind a group of savages and no longer presented himself as a target. With an oath Richardson uncocked the rifle and turned back toward our camp.

"You'll live to be sorry you didn't take the chance and let me bore him when I had him lined," he warned. "He's traveling north. We'll run into him up on the Knife."

I feared as much, and yet it would have been suicide to shoot the fellow. Mr. Manuel wanted him dead. It would have been better for the United States to have killed him. And yet there was our business among the Minnetarees and Mandans and the possibility of conciliating the Sioux. The work on the Knife outweighed the importance of Le Fou's death.

Thus far the Sioux had made no open attacks on Americans. They would kill a hunter if they caught him alone, but such murders resulted from a natural predatory instinct and not from organized war against the United States.

On reaching camp I urged an immediate start north across the open country. Richardson insisted that we wait until it was dark. I conceded that his was the wiser course, as once we left cover we would be seen did any red scouts cross the river and penetrate the grove.

We dined off some cooked meat and waited for the first darkness. A faint sound of yelling brought us to our feet.

"They ain't found our trail," muttered Richardson. "But something's happened. Stick here and watch the nags while I make a scout."

"And fire your rifle and betray us," I retorted.

"Ain't such a danged fool as you opine. I ain't going to be seen, or do any shooting."

He disappeared up the bank, and I hurriedly flung the packs on the led horse. That task finished, I followed the hunter. The yelling had died down, and as it would soon be dark enough to start our flight I was anxious for Richardson to return. The timber was clean and open and had but little undergrowth, and my progress was rapid and noiseless. I had reached a point where I could see the fires up-stream and on the opposite side when I was frozen in my tracks by a voice ahead warning—

"Don't move, *m'sieur*."

"—— you!" choked Richardson. "How did you come here?"

"Don't move. Ah, I thought I knew that tall figure. It is M'sieur Richardson, the brave hunter."

I crept forward until I could see my companion. He was standing with his rifle across his left arm. A dozen feet in front of him and with only his head and

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shoulders showing from behind a big cottonwood was Balise. I identified him by his voice as his face was painted in a hideous pattern.

His long rifle was covering the hunter, and the latter knew that he could not swing his gun into line without catching a bullet. And Balise had proven his deadly marksmanship throughout the trip up the river.

I drew a bead between his eyes but did not dare cock my rifle. Even had my piece been cocked I do not believe I could have shot him without his pulling the trigger. The fact that he had not shot Richardson down from ambush suggested that he desired a parley. During their talk I hoped that there would be a moment when he would relax his alertness and give me an opportunity to drop him.

Richardson stood as motionless as a tree.

"You —— skunk!" he gritted.

"It depends on the point of view, *m'sieur*," was the mocking reply. "How came you here?"

Richardson was silent for a few moments, then sullenly grunted:

"What do you s'pose? Think I'm hunting for a tavern?"

"The other hunters? Are any of them with you?"

Richardson was quick to realize that Balise thought he had been put ashore to bag game for a boat's crew. He answered—

"I came ashore alone."

Balise stared at him steadily for a bit; then said:

"You saved my life once, *m'sieur*. I always pay my debts—once. If I owe death, I kill. If I owe a life, I give it. If you do not prevent me I will give you your life. But tell me the truth and be quick. For if any of the savages come from the camp you must die. When did you come ashore?"

Richardson promptly lied:

"Early last night. Belter, the only other hunter, was kept on board 'cause the creoles were scared. I'm waiting for the boat to come along. Heard yelling up this way and come to see what's up. What's the yowling about?"

"About the devil. He wears a tame crow on his shoulder. When he came into the camp I took a stroll."

"Medicine Crow!"

"That's one of his names. He has another that you'd say more softly. You didn't stay long at Lisa's new fort."

"Only long enough to unpack part of the goods. Mr. Manuel is sending Mandan Ramsay with the rest of the outfit up to the Mandan villages."

"When did you start?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Just stopped long enough to empty part of the cargo box."

"But the boat has not had time to come this far. Ramsay could not have traveled last night."

He was growing suspicious. I hoped that Richardson would lie plausibly.

"Who said he could travel at night? But I can travel by night. I'm waiting for him to come along and pick me up."

"Then you have some game for the boat?"

"A deer and two buffalo down at the mouth."

Balise was suspicious and yet had nothing tangible to base his suspicions on. Doubtless his devil's brain was planning to capture the boat and crew when it came up. I would not knowingly do an injustice even to the man from Balise, and yet I have always believed that his talk about paying his debts were so many words and that, had he known Richardson was making an overland trip, he would have had no scruples in murdering the hunter offhand. Anyway he said:

"I owe you one life, *m'sieur*. I always pay. I will square the debt. The next time we meet you will take your chance."

"I'll take a bigger chance to git your hair then I took when I yanked you out of the river," promised the hunter.

This display of anger seemed to please Balise. Perhaps because it dispelled his distrust of the situation. He laughed softly and directed:

"Turn back to the river, then travel south very hard. The Indians are traveling north and will pick you up if you stay here on the river. Tell your friend Ramsay that I got ahead of him with the war news and that if he is wise he will turn back to the post."

"So that was your game! To git up here and raise —— with the tribes!" snorted Richardson.

"That was my game, and it has worked," retorted Balise. "But you go now, before some of my red friends come across the river. Don't try to get a shot at me. I shall stay here well covered, and the sound

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of a shot will bring the Indians down on you."

"Oh, I know when I'm licked," growled Richardson. "I'll go fast enough. I'm going now. If you want to shoot me in the back, shoot and be ——!"

With that he turned his back to Balise and came toward me. I flattened against a tree so that he might not see me and, by demonstration of surprize, arouse Balise's suspicions.

But Richardson was thorough in his craft. His shifting gaze picked me up readily enough, but there was no hesitance in his step as he swung by and left me alone to trail Balise.

I waited, thinking that my man would emerge from his tree once Richardson was well on his way down the river. The silence continued, however, and the night began to blot out all but immediate objects. If he would not come to me then I must go to him, and I commenced a circling movement to cut him off from the red camp. The fellow was a consummate woodsman; for the big cottonwood-tree was empty, and I had heard no sound of his withdrawal.

I scouted up the river-bank until directly opposite the camp and was in time to see the head and shoulders of Balise as he forded the river in a ruddy path cast by one of the Indian fires. He presented a perfect target as he waded through the shallow, muddy waters with the broad shoulders outlined against the flames. But I held my fire for the same reason as I had restrained the hunter from potting Le Fou.

Turning down the bank, I hurried to our dark camp and found Richardson waiting for me near the spot where he had met Balise. He had turned back to be in at the killing.

"Git him?" he eagerly asked.

"He's back with his red friends. He was too sly for me. I could have shot him but that would have killed both of us."

"—— him! Giving me my life, eh?"

"He did more than I believed he could. He had a chance to kill and let you go."

"You oughter shot him, Mandan. The time to git them is when you have them lined. The man you git can never git you."

It annoyed and humiliated him to remember that he had been in the man's power, and had I assented he would have stalked the camp and risked a shot regardless of the consequences. I endeavored to make him see the folly of permitting a personal enmity to obstruct our important task of reaching the Minnetaree villages and nullifying the influence of the British traders. He could see only the uncanceled grudge of the moment. In his code scores should be paid as fast as they came up. He went with me instead of seeking vengeance simply because I now ranked as a *partisan*, or the commander of an expedition, and had the same official standing as is possessed by a *bourgeois*.

RIDING to our stirrups in the grass, we held a course due north and soon were across the river-bottom and following a path through the range of low hills. We knew we must halt and rest our animals, and we believed that Balise had swallowed Richardson's story about the boat. Had he doubted it I fear he would not have been so punctilious in discharging his debt by permitting my companion to escape.

Thinking that I was bound up-river, he would rally his red allies and remain hidden until Richardson should show himself on the bank and signal for the boat to swing inshore. While he was thus wasting his time we would refresh our horses and press on to the Heart River.

We had not hurried in crossing the open river-bottoms as the distance was not more than half a mile. We passed through the rounded hills and entered upon a country sprinkled with small stones and having but little grass. We walked our animals for several hours, hoping to get clear of the barren area and find cover. We were forced to halt and spread our blankets on the stony soil while the horses made the best of the poor grazing.

Inside of three hours it was light enough to discern the face of the country, and my eyes verified what the horses' hoofs and the hardness of my resting-place already had told me. The soil had but little depth, and the herbage was stunted and thin. On the low ridges there was scarcely any grass. Richardson had passed over the inhospitable area several times. He assured me that we soon would strike into fertile grasslands and find much game.

An hour after sunrise we came upon scattered herds of buffaloes and rode deep

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in the grass again. As we were passing to windward of some eight hundred of the shaggy creatures Richardson cried—

"Marrer-bones!"

And he let go with his long rifle and knocked over a fat cow. The herd took fright and galloped away to the west.

Richardson grinned shamefacedly on beholding my disapproval, and apologized:

"Mebbe I didn't oughter do that, Mandan Ramsay, but I'm hankering for marrer-bones. And a hungry stomach don't have much sense."

"Your rifle-shot carried very far in this morning air, sir," I rebuked him.

Then as he swung out of the saddle and ran toward the cow with drawn knife I threw up my rifle and killed a large rattlesnake.

"Much obleeged," muttered Richardson, glaring at the writhing coils. "Never see the pizen cuss. Never heard him rattle, neither. Hoss so danged numb he never seen him, neither. Might as well have the marrer-bones now we've risked two shots to git them."

He fell to work with his knife and soon had the bones hanging at his saddle, and we were off at a gallop. We had advertised our passing by raising the buffalo, by the carcass of the cow and the shattered length of the snake. Even if the shots had not been heard the signs were ample to attract the attention of the savages.

Richardson realized our danger and frequently swept his gaze to the south. There was nothing to be seen but the scattered herds of buffaloes and the dust kicked up by the runaways.

Near noon Richardson pointed to a curiously shaped hill on our right, some five miles away. It was square-cut at the ends and level along the top except for a sharp, slender peak that rose from the center. Its resemblance to a house with a steeple was most realistic.

"You've seen it, end on, enough times from the river, only from a boat it looks like any bluff," said my companion. "If we swing over there to the north we'll find good grass, water and wood, and a rare lookout for spying on our back trail."

I was for holding straight ahead for the Heart; but he insisted that we would not be traveling much out of our way; and he reminded me that if there was no sign of the enemy we could rest a bit and then continue and make the river some time in the evening. As we neared the western end of the ridge it rapidly changed in appearance until it had no resemblance to a house. The country became more broken as we rounded the ridge; but on the north side we found a handsome grove, a tiny creek flowing toward the Heart and an abundance of grass.

I gathered wood for a fire while Richardson penetrated the grove and shot a cow in the prairie opening beyond. The cow was fat, weighing between six and seven hundred pounds. The same creature early in the season would not have weighed much more than three hundred pounds.

Had Richardson been out hunting for a keelboat crew with no fear of Indians he would have cut the carcass into twenty pieces, with the tongue going to himself. As it was, he contented himself with lifting the back—the *grosse bosse* as our creoles called it—and taking the tongue and more marrow-bones.

We were too hungry to wait for dusk to hide our smoke, and after a reconnaissance from the top of the ridge, decided to risk a small fire after taking care to select the driest of the dead branches. We soon were broiling the meat and roasting the marrow-bones. With the cooking under way I left Richardson to attend to it and again ascended the ridge and examined the back country. The sun was within two hours of the horizon and threw the scattered herds of buffaloes into bold relief. I could detect no sign of horsemen and returned to the fire.

With salt from my bag we feasted royally, each of us devouring enough meat to arouse the envy of a *mangeur de lard*. It was all so comfortable that I was loath to proceed farther. Richardson was pleased over my willingness to tarry and was quite eloquent in painting the advantages of a good long rest and an early morning start. Yet after we had smoked a pipe over it and I was quite reconciled to the delay my companion began to display symptoms of nervousness.

"What's wrong? Aren't you feeling comfortable?" I asked after watching him fidget and twist about.

"If we was on the south side I could roll in my blanket and go to sleep," he grumbled. "But just because we've got the ridge atween us and any redskins I keep feeling

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like they was waiting on t'other side till it gits dark enough to jump us. 'Low I'll climb the ridge and take a squint."

Now that I realized he was uneasy I began to entertain vague fears. I suddenly felt as if we were being watched. Richardson mounted the ridge and spent several minutes in studying the country. I knew he had discovered nothing to cause him alarm, for he took his time in descending.

"Nothing near the bluff 'cept two old bulls grazing in a hollow," he reported. "I'm willing to stay here or go on."

"You'd rather go on," I accused him. "You've changed your tune. Do you fear the Indians will come up and jump us during the night?"

"I don't feel right," he sheepishly confessed. "But the Injuns won't travel after dark. They like to hive up after sundown. They can't foller a trail at night. There ain't none in sight.

"But my medicine is acting up. Seems to be whispering to me for us to be going. Mebbe it's 'cause we're too near the river and might git penned in if we was jumped."

"If they're not in sight and following our trail they can't possibly stumble on us in the night," I said. "But if you're nervous——"

"——! I ain't scared," he snorted. "Let's not say no more about it."

Yet something was disturbing him; something he couldn't put a name to. With a night's rest I knew we could make a forced march on the morrow and come very close to making the first Mandan village some four miles below the Knife. Our horses were grazing for dear life, and the pack-animal was rolling to ease his aching back. I could not shake off my shadow fears; and yet reason scoffed at the notion of any imminent danger.

"The horses need the rest. We'll gain time by waiting," I decided.

"——! You don't have to coax me, Mandan Ramsay, I ain't scared."

Richardson filled his pipe and stretched out at full length and smoked in silence. He affected to be enjoying himself immensely, and yet I knew something was worrying him. His class never gave away to imagination, but met the troubles as they occurred. I emptied a second pipe, sent my gaze along the top of the sunlit ridge and remarked:

"There's another medicine bull. Like the one you shot off the top of the cliff at the Sleeper's camp."

He slowly shifted his position and fell to choking over his tobacco-smoke.

"Two of them," I added as a second massive head came into view.

One of the shaggy heads was staring down at us, although I did not believe the hair-veiled eyes could make us out. Possibly he was getting the smell of the horses. The second animal was too busy feeding to waste time in viewing the scenery. His head was close to the ground and moving from side to side as he snatched at tufts of grass.

Richardson sat up and yawned and stretched his arms, then gathered up his blanket and rifle, rose to his feet and remarked:

"Going to find a spot to take a short snooze in. I'll be back after forty winks. You may 'low it's best to make the Heart before taking a real rest."

With that he lounged to the tiny creek and disappeared in clump of willows.

I SHOOK off my depression by turning my thoughts on Balise and Le Fou. I hoped they were watching the river for my keelboat. I wondered what powerful incentive was sending them in such haste and with so much duplicity above the Arikara villages. Mr. Manuel's words returned to me, wherein he expressed his anxiety over the possible use of arsenic by Le Fou or Medicine Crow, the strange medicine-man.

Next I was remembering that neither the hunter nor I had seen the one-eyed mystery man and his tame crow in the red camp on the Cannon Ball. This gave me hope that the white men and the medicine-man had parted company.

The air was soft and balmy, and with no mosquitoes to bother me I felt strongly inclined to follow Richardson's example and snatch a bit of sleep. But the hunter had acted oddly in withdrawing to the willows to take his nap. He and his kind usually slept where they happened to be when the mood was on them.

I blinked up at the top of the ridge, where the last rays of the sun were gilding the tower-shaped formation; and I sleepily observed that only one of the bulls was there. The huge brute was still grazing, only his head showing.

I was withdrawing my gaze when I

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experienced something of a shock on discovering that the second buffalo had worked down nearly to the bottom of the slope. He had followed one of the several furrows and was nosing about industriously. Only the head and shaggy mane were visible.

As the head turned toward me and remained stationary for a moment it gave me an uncanny feeling. Buffaloes are near-sighted and depend much on their sense of smell. What breeze there was blew toward the river, and the brute could not have scented me. Yet in the few seconds the head was turned on me I was convinced that I had been observed. I knew this could not be, for I was reclining, and even at a much less distance a buffalo could not distinguish me from a rock or a tree, if he saw my figure at all. It was much as if my mind were turning red and I were believing all the Indian stories about the medicine-buffalo, the mythical spirit guardian of the shaggy creatures.

The suggestion of motion in a second furrow caused my drowsiness to drop from me as quickly as a warrior going into battle discards his robe. Something was crossing the furrow directly in line with my position. It seemed shapeless and moved slowly. At first I thought of a wolf; but it was too long for a wolf, and that scavenger of the plains will waste no time, unless starving and hunting in a pack, in stalking a bull. Their pickings are on the open plain, whenever they can dodge by a sentinel bull and steal a calf or pull down a cow.

Now the thing in the furrow elongated and glided up the western side of the hollow and became the figure of a man. And as I gaped at it the bull's attention was attracted and the shaggy head was jerked above the rim of the furrow and toward the man. A stream of fire streaked toward the animal, and I was beholding the miracle of a buffalo bull throwing away his head.

My befuddled wits cleared up, and I was shooting at the creature on top of the ridge. Richardson called out to me and bounded to where the Indian was writhing about on the brown grass, his huge disguise lying in the bottom of the hollow.

I started up the slope as the hunter leaped on the wounded Indian. I saw the long knife rise and fall, and the next moment the hunter was scrambling to the top of the ridge. When I gained his side he had finished reloading his rifle. A naked Indian, clutching bow and arrows, was bounding from the foot of the ridge and heading south. The hunter fired but inflicted no damage.

With a string of furious oaths Richardson hurled the fresh scalp to the ground and bitterly complained—

"We oughter bagged the two of them."

"But you knew the truth when you took your blanket and left me," I gasped.

"And I was a fool not to 'a' told you," he groaned, his gaze still following the receding figure of the naked savage. "I was 'fraid you'd make some move that would give the game away. See that —— run! Got his pony hid in some hollow. If we only had had our horses on this side!"

"Then they might have worked close enough to have shot one of us. How did you guess the truth?"

As we hurried down the slope to where the dead Indian was sprawling on his back he explained:

"No sense in buffalo quitting good grazing to climb up a thinly grassed ridge. If there'd been only one he'd 'a' stood a better show of fooling me; but the two of them was too much.

"When a bull quits a herd he goes by his lone. Some other bull has licked him so bad he knows his herd-days are over. It all sorter leaked into my mind after my medicine kept trying to tell me to keep my eyes open.

"Two bulls! They quit good grazing to climb a ridge where the feed is poor! They always keep head on towards us! Just look to what that cuss has been toting round!"

He picked up the head of the bull, cunningly boned so as to allow it to be slipped on like a gigantic mask. The mane fell over the wearer's shoulders. The flaps of skin hanging down in front completed the deception so long as the Indian kept his head toward us and his body partly concealed in a hollow. I stared at the dead savage to discover his tribe.

"Minnetaree," muttered Richardson.

He was identifying the dead man by the parallel bands tattooed across the chest and throat—a style peculiar to the Minnetarees and almost always confined to warriors past middle age. Ugly cicatrices in the chest and on the shoulders testified to the man's participation in the ceremony of the Nahpike, annually observed by this tribe and similar, in the self-torture inflicted, to the Sundance of the Sioux.

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Although the discovery was most disturbing, I was compelled to agree with the hunter as to the dead man's tribe. I could only hope he had left his people to live with the Sioux: perhaps had been captured and adopted bv them, and that the war-party he had been attached to was composed of Sioux, and not of men from the Big Knife River.

"One got away. We must be going," Richardson reminded me. "Still figger on going to the Minnetaree villages?"

"I must. But you had better stay in the Mandan village."

"Mandan Ramsay, I cal'late you rank as *partisan* on this trip. But just the same you can take that bag of talk and go plumb to ——!" he wrathfully informed me.'

We packed our led animal and mounted and once more were in flight through the dusk of early evening. Somewhere behind us a naked Indian scout was flogging his pony to find his band and arouse his companions' fury by telling of the coup Richardson had counted. Nor was Richardson without pride over his exploit; and he boasted:

"I'll l'arn the red ——s! I'll l'arn them I can wear a wolf's tail on my ankle!"

"You believe it's a Minnetaree band?" I asked.

"I'd s'pose so," he replied. "But—" and he swung low from the saddle, straightened up, and qualified—"this little posy makes me think the main band is Sioux after all."

And he handed me the dotted blossom of the button-snake root. My hopes went up, and I tried to make myself believe that the Minnetaree, as a tribe, had not yet smoked British tobacco against us.

For when the button-snakeroot is in full bloom the Sioux living nearest the Mandan and Minnetaree villages, know that the corn is ripe and that the annual truce is in force between them and the Knife River corn-growers from the moment the buyers come in sight of the villages until they disappear beyond the surrounding bluffs.

The scouts were from a band traveling north. I hoped it was a Sioux, bound for the Knife to buy corn.

WE MADE the Heart a mile or so from its mouth and near the site of an ancient Mandan village that was abandoned even before Sieur de la Verendrye visited the Mandan country in 1740. The influence of the red country on my companion was shown after we had built a tiny fire in a grove and were preparing to enjoy a few hours of sleep. At first I thought he had fallen asleep with his feet in the fire; for the odor of burning leather was pronounced. Then I discovered that he was deliberately scorching the soles of his extra pair of moccasins, one sure way of keeping ghosts at a distance.

Neither by word nor look did I betray any skepticism., Many of our veteran hunters in throwing off the trammels of civilization had taken on some of the fears and beliefs of the aborigines. So Richardson gravely scorched his moccasins to keep the ghosts of the dead village from crowding around us; and we set our minds to wake up an hour before sunrise.

We were awake on the dot and after eating crossed the river and ascended the bluffs. As we halted on top of the bluffs the sun was half over the horizon.

Far in the south beyond a grove of cottonwoods we beheld a dark patch that was neither shadow nor grazing buffaloes. At first we could detect no motion, and only as the patch grew larger and individual dots began to show did we learn that the distance between us and our pursuers was decreasing rapidly.

"Feller who got away from us has raised his band," said Richardson. "We're in for a race to the lower Mandan village—'bout fifty miles."

We quit the bluffs and soon were traveling through many herds of buffaloes. Richardson eyed them hungrily as it was an ideal country for a hunter, the surface being much broken into low ridges and narrow valleys. It was an excellent country to hide in, too, did the chase grow too hot.

We traveled at a steady pace until eleven o'clock, when we halted in a hollow and ate and allowed the horses a breathing-spell. Richardson mounted a ridge and reported a string of horsemen descending a slope.

"They've gained on us considerable. Prob'ly ain't spared their critters. But it's best to have a nag fresh towards the end of a race."

We pushed on at the same easy gait and shortly after noon crossed a ridge that was considerably higher than any we had surmounted that day. From the top of

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this we had an excellent view of the surrounding country, and soon picked up the horsemen filing out of a narrow valley.

That they promptly sighted us was proven by the mad galloping of their ponies. Their haste to overtake us did not throw us into any panic; for so long as they remained out of arrow-range we were as safe as if they had been drunk at Mr. Manuel's new post.

In the north was a four-mile-wide plain, level as a floor and destitute of trees and shrubs, but richly grassed. I counted twenty herds of buffaloes feeding over this. We descended and entered the plain at a smart gallop, passing close to the herds and the score or more wolves attending each. The wolves displayed no more fear of us than did the buffaloes.

This plain was bounded on the north by a long ridge. On our right, and some six miles distant, was a chain of hills.

"Bluffs of the Missouri," said Richardson, sweeping a big hand toward the hills.

He changed his course to a long diagonal that would fetch us to the hills. I started to remonstrate; then it all came back to me. Previous to this I had viewed the plain from the north.

"The old Mandan road!" I cried, referring to the ancient trace the Mandans use when hunting south of their villages.

Richardson grinned and urged his mount to a sharper clip. I was leading the pack-animal and began to lose ground. He reined in for me to catch up, and as I joined him I glanced back and beheld some thirty Indians streaming from the high ridge.

We struck into the road, a road in name only. As a trail it was well defined; but constant travel in the warm months, and the weather, had gullied it in places, and in others had left mud-holes deep enough to hide horse and rider. But it led us to the hills by the best route.

The hills were bluffs when viewed from the river; and somehow I was hungry for a glimpse of the turbid Missouri. An hour's ride brought us to a narrow valley carved through the limestone formation, and on rounding the last turn we came in view of the broad river.

Now the trail entered a pleasing plain between the bluffs and the river. This level stretch widened out as we advanced and was dotted with clumps of trees.

After thirty minutes of riding Richardson pointed to a mounted Indian galloping down a bluff ahead at break-neck speed. He disappeared in the direction we were taking.

"Mandan scout! Gone to tell the village we're coming!" shouted Richardson.

Then he glanced back and added—

"He's gone to tell that t'other fellers are coming, too."

I turned my head and saw our pursuers strung out in a long line. They had gained rapidly since we lost sight of them on entering the valley. They were flogging their ponies in a mad endeavor to overhaul us.

This zeal to overtake us and kill us before we came in sight of the village convinced me that the Indians were Sioux and that the annual truce during the corn-trading season would protect us could we keep up the race until seen by the village. On the other hand they were free to murder us at any time before we raised the village, just as the Mandans were at liberty to kill them at any time prior to their sighting the circular lodges. And did the Sioux violate the unwritten law of generations by shedding blood within view of the village then the entire male population would swoop down upon and exterminate them.

We had been saving our horses for the last mile. Richardson was leading the pack-animal and pounding ahead. Before us was a large grove, and more than once in all seasons had I traveled around it. Just beyond the grove was Metutahanke—"the lower village."

The Sioux sounded their war-cry, and arrows began streaming by us. The pack-animal became stubborn, and even Richardson's iron wrist could not hold the brute up to the mark. I belabored him from behind; and he swerved to one side, nearly yanking the hunter from the saddle. Then a long war-arrow plowed his flank, and with a tremendous burst of speed he wrenched the rawhide line from the hunter's hand and raced like a wolf for the grove and around it.

Richardson turned in his saddle and fired his rifle; but even as he began to face to the rear every savage vanished over the side of his pony, and [illegible]
I yelled for him to [illegible]
a fight; and before the Indians could [illegible]
shooting we skirted the grove; and there

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was the village before us. The lone scout had carried the news of our coming, and the tops of the huge lodges were crowded with people.

Our pack-animal seemed to know that he had reached a sanctuary, as he had halted midway between the grove and the lodges to feed. As we came up to him many men ran out to meet us.

The Sioux came into sight, jogging along sedately. They had their robes over their shoulders, and not a weapon was to be seen. As old acquaintances recognized the hunter and me we were forced to slow down to a walk, sometimes halting, to clasp the hands outstretched on each side of our advance.

The Sioux cantered by, not one of them glancing at us, and entered the village ahead of us. Shahaka, or Big White as we called him after his French name of Lè Gros Blanc, bustled through the crowd and boomed a hearty welcome.

"Come in house," he roared in English, seizing both my hands. "Come in house."

And he freed a hand to seize that of Richardson. I had helped to convey him in safety to this village in 1809 after Ensign Pryor with a detachment of soldiers had failed because of the Arikaras' hostility. As the guest of the Government, represented by Lewis and Clark, he had toured the States from St. Louis to Washington, and had been received by President Jefferson. We turned the horses over to a young man, and I told the chief—

"Bad Indians have followed us for a long time."

"The peace covers all," he assured me in the Mandan tongue. "You are safe."

"They are Sioux, but I think a Minnetaree man is with them," I said.

He shook his head.

"No Minnetaree. Sioux. Come trade. Good Sioux now. One white man with them."

I glanced at Richardson, but his expression evidenced that he was as surprized as I at the statement. The Indians had passed close to us, and while we had not scrutinized each one closely it did not seem possible that a white man could have been with them, even if wearing a long [illegible] discover him.

[illegible] the way to the village, the chief walking at my side and showing his favor by keeping a hand on my shoulder. We came up to where the Sioux had dismounted on the edge of the village, and I searched the different groups closely to find a white man. I discovered none and believed Big White must have been mistaken.

Richardson called out to them:

"Where is the Minnetaree man who turned into a buffalo bull? They say his medicine was very weak."

Murderous glances were darted at us, but no hand crept to a weapon. The Mandans understood something of the veiled taunt, and their eyes glistened. They would much prefer that a Sioux, or a Minnetaree riding with them, should die instead of a white man.

Big White paused and spoke a few words with the Sioux leader concerning the coming trade in corn, and then escorted us to his lodge. Just inside the entrance I was greeted by an American rooster crowing lustily. The bird was one of several the chief had brought back from the States.

His squaw, who had accompanied him on his visit to Washington, showed her white teeth in a smile and pointed to the kettle. The chief explained that she had started it boiling the moment the scout returned from the bluff and reported that two white men were coming.

The three of us sat down and had a smoke. I delivered amiable messages from Lewis, Clark and other St. Louis notables to the chief, and was beginning to question him concerning the status of the tribes toward the United States when a warrior thrust his head inside the door and announced—

"Another white man comes."

BIG WHITE at once stepped outside, and we heard him greet some one and urge him to partake of his hospitality. Then he entered and spread a robe for Balise. The Frenchman had washed the paint from his face, and his long features looked rather haggard. He showed no surprize on beholding the hunter and me, and with a grim smile saluted us:

"*M'sieur* the *bourgeois; m'sieur* the big hunter. We meet again. I hungered for your distinguished company and spoiled a horse in trying to overtake you."

"You came along with the Sioux," accused Richardson.

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"One has strange traveling-companions in the Mandan country," he replied.

"You lost one of yours below the Heart," said the hunter.

Balise smiled whimsically and shrugged his shoulders.

"The poor ——! He was a very brave man. He was old and had painted his chest and throat. He did not need to count any more coups. But his ambition was never satisfied.

"Yes; we found him—and his scalp thrown on the ground before it had passed through the smoke. While he has lived some time with the Sioux his people may feel displeased when shown the scalp and are told it was treated as if a coward had grown it."

"We'll smoke your hair so your friends can't find any fault," growled Richardson.

"All debts are paid. That is *m'sieur's* poor privilege if luck favors him."

"You owe me a life, Balise. I had you covered in the woods while you were talking with Richardson," I announced.

"Death of my life! And you did not fire. Ah, perhaps the camp was too close, eh? I think I owe you nothing, *m'sieur*. You were saving your own life, not sparing mine. But *m'sieur* the hunter shall pay dearly some time for telling the story about a boat coming up the river. If one of our young men had not found where you had left your horses we should have been slow in getting up here."

Richardson guffawed heartily, and taunted:

"All I ask is to git my hooks into your carcass. I'll tear all your ribs loose at the first yank."

"You're an unmitigated scoundrel, Balise," I added. "You'll settle with me before I go down the river."

He darted me a ferocious glance and hissed—

"My medicine tells me you will never go down the Missouri again."

Big White, who was catching enough of our talk to know we were enemies, gravely pointed to the steaming meat the squaw had placed on wooden platters, and we remembered our manners and placed our quarrel to one side for the time being. After we had eaten and while Balise was conversing with our host I spoke to Richardson, who departed on my errand. Then I asked Balise—

*"Où est Le Fou?"*

Instead of returning a laughing reply as I had expected his face grew grave, and I could have sworn that his half-closed eyes were worried.

"I do not know," he quietly told me.

Then in a burst of confidence he added:

"Truth is, *m'sieur*, Le Fou got out of hand. I tell you this as I know you will not repeat it. The Indians have spoiled Le Fou. Why, the pig believes he is a greater man than I!"

He paused and puckered his lips whimsically, then sighed:

"Death of my life! I begin to believe he is greater than I—up here."

"He has been traveling with Medicine Crow," I reminded him.

"But yes. And each one was traveling with Death."

"Dangerous to each other?" I incredulously asked.

"Dangerous to every white man on the upper Missouri," he gloomily replied. "Le Fou has become a red man. His white blood has been washed out. He is dangerous to Americans; which is as it should be. He will be dangerous to the British; which is not what was planned."

"Is it useless to ask you to explain a bit, M'sieur Balise?"

"No. You will never tell. It's very simple, only I never foresaw it, or I should not have followed him into the river to save his life. In time I fear it will hit at me. I believed I had the whip-hand. I knew the Indians would make much of him and accept him as being strong medicine. I had planned for *that*.

"But what I did not know, and did not plan for, was the poison. I did not know until too late that Le Fou was bringing poison into the country."

"Arsenic."

"To be sure. Arsenic. *M'sieur* is shrewd. Once the pig's twisted mind has tasted of power through the use of the poison this will not be either English or American country. It is like giving a madman a sharp knife and turning him loose among helpless people.

"Although called Le Fou he is very cunning in a way. He is puffed up by the homage the Indians pay him. Soon he will take the notion to announce himself a bigger medicine-man than even Medicine Crow.



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"He may say that a certain man—perhaps I the man from Balise—will die in so many days. Then I am careless in eating meat—and die. Word will spread through all the tribes that the *wakan* white man can tell when men will die to a day. Then they will say and believe he can *will* men to die. And the —— of it is, *m'sieur*, he can do all he boasts as long as the poison lasts."

"And you expect me to believe that you didn't provide the poison, and didn't plan for him to use it on the Sleeper's band?"

His thin face became very ugly as in a soft whisper he murmured—

"I shall have the great pleasure of cutting *m'sieur's* throat in doubting my word."

"When it comes to cutting throats one does not always have that game his own way. I am confident I shall go down the river and leave you here to dry in a tree, or on a burial scaffold."

He fingered the torn and soiled jabot and retorted:

"Passing threats is boys' talk. Let us be judged by results. I say I was surprized when the meat was poisoned in the Sleeper's camp. I did not disapprove, providing it could end there. Had the Sleeper's men eaten and died, Mandan Ramsay would have been blamed, and the Sioux would have united against all Americans.

"I did not know Le Fou was to steal away with the Indians. So I followed, thinking to overtake him and get the poison from him. Could I have been assured that it would have been used only against *m'sieur* and his countrymen——"

He shrugged his shoulders and added—

"Everything is fair in war; but unfortunately Le Fou has no head."

"But you did overtake him."

"Not to see him alone. The Medicine Crow was with him. The pig was out of hand. His twisted brain was telling him he was a very great man. He saw warriors step aside and give him all the path.

"Death of the ——! Does *m'sieur* know why I left his amiable company? The —— spawn gave orders to *me!* Yes, I, the man from Balise, the man of many secrets, the friend of Don Ulloa, was given orders by that ape of a creature! Alas! What was more humiliating, I had to bow the head and smile. So I left him."

"He killed James, pushed another hunter overboard and tried to shoot me."

"That was war. *M'sieur's* news must be delayed until word could be brought to the British traders from the Red River country. You see I speak frankly. That part of the business is all ended. *M'sieur* got through. Now we pick up the fight up here among the villages."

"Mr. Manuel is on his guard. He will win that fight."

BEFORE he could reply Richardson came into the lodge carrying one of the several United States flags Mr. Manuel had packed in our equipment. Balise smiled grimly on beholding the flag and informed me—

"I think I am ahead of you, *m'sieur*."

Richardson harshly broke in—

"The skunk has had them run up a British flag!"

"In that case it must come down," I said, knowing boldness must win, or the sooner the hunter and I fled down the river the better it would be for us.

"Le Gros Blanc will have something to say about that," observed Balise, repeating his words in the Mandan tongue.

The chief was worried and could not conceal the fact. Hudson's Bay and the Northwest traders had given flags to the Indians for eight or ten years. No Americans had objected to their being flown.

"It is a brave flag," repeated Balise.

"It is an enemy's flag, raised by a renegade Frenchman, by a man without a country, and one who must take for his name the name of a plague-spot," I declared.

Turning to Big White, I held up the United States flag and said:

"Shahaka, this is the flag you should be showing in Metutahanke. The United States is at war with Great Britain."

"It is a good flag," he promptly acknowledged. "I saw it many times down the river over the big lodges of the white men. But the flag now flying is the same the traders brought to us before Lewis and Clark came here. My people do not want any trouble. There is room for two flags."

And he gazed apprehensively from me to Balise.

"There is room for only one flag," I insisted.

"Only one flag, Le Gros Blanc; the one now flying," added Balise.

The doorway of the lodge already was

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darkened by warriors pressing close to listen to the quarrel between the white men. The Mandans knew nothing about the United States beyond what Big White had told them, and the lies told them by the Canadian traders. To convince them of the superiority of the American people it would be necessary for the representative of that people to prove himself. I told Big White:

"This runaway Frenchman and I will go outside. When I bring you his ears you will take my flag."

"Death of my life! But your ears shall leave your head for that!" grated Balise.

The men outside the door shuffled about in keen anticipation of witnessing a bloody duel. Richardson bellowed like a wounded bull and whipped out his long knife and yelled:

"It's my fight! And by the Etarnal I'll have his ears and his hair, too!"

"Stop!" thundered Big White, stepping before the hunter and grasping his wrist. "If you want to paint a line around your arm to show you have killed a man you will count your coup outside this village. If two men can fight here, then a dozen can fight here. Two tribes can fight here. And never again will the snake-flower mean peace during the corn-trading time."

Our unseen audience grumbled its disappointment. Already Shahaka was losing his grip on his people because of the amazing stories about his travels among the white people. The Indians have small use for a liar; and he described things they could not comprehend and consequently could not believe. Then again he was naturally a talkative man, another trait condemned by the aborigines.

Nor was his personal presentment that of a warrior. He was inclined to stoutness, and possessed a mild, good-natured disposition. He had held his position as principal chief of the Metutahanke solely because of his intellectual gifts.

His decisive stand would have been endorsed had it been taken for any purpose other than to prevent a fight. His eyes grew troubled as he heard the muttering of his men. He made a silent appeal to me to bury the quarrel.

But if the enemy's flag were not at once replaced by the Stars and Stripes my business was finished there and then. If I left the hostile flag undisturbed I would receive a sorry welcome in the Minnetaree villages. With Le Borgne active in plotting against all Americans the more conservative faction would hesitate to accept as friend a man who had been rebuffed in the peaceful Mandan village. Shahaka continued:

"There is a band of Sioux in this village. They come to trade for corn with us and the Minnetarees. If the peace can be broken by white men it can be broken by them. There shall be no killings here."

Balise smiled triumphantly as he saw me being maneuvered by my friend into a corner. Yet the flag must come down. A white voice outside yelled—

"Throw the —— Americans into the river!"

Some of the red men, probably Sioux, grunted approval. Richardson started to find the speaker, but I held him back. It would have been the end of Mr. Manuel's plans did a Canadian trader goad us into breaking the truce.

"*M'sieur* would not make a good chess-player," remarked Balise.

I said to Big White:

"Shahaka has been long among my people and has seen our mighty villages of stone and wood. He knows we are the first people among the white tribes. He knows we are his friends, and he wears our gift as a medicine."

I pointed to the big medal on his chest.

"Being his friends," I continued, "the Americans will not shed blood and break the law of the village during the corn-trading season."

Balise laughed loudly. The white man outside hooted in derision. The Indians were very quiet; but I knew what they were thinking: Mandan Ramsay was a coward. I continued:

"Yet the flag of my people's enemies should not be seen in the lower village, nor in Ruptari across the river. This man, who is neither American nor English, and who has been cast out by the French, is a trouble-maker. He will go outside with me. We will have no weapons but our empty hands. I will whip him, but will not kill him."

Richardson roared:

"No, Mandan Ramsay! This —— is my meat!"

The hunter was a powerful fellow. In a rough-and-tumble fight he was a better

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man than I. Had I not been looked upon as the leader and he as my man I would not have hesitated to satisfy his battle lust and set him loose on Balise. But to do this under the circumstances would have cost me my standing and have branded me as a coward.

I motioned for him to be silent, and turned to Balise. The latter stared at me in amazement; then exclaimed:

"Dog of the rabble! You propose that I, *sieur*—that I, the man from Balise, should soil my hands with you?"

"You two would fight like squaws?" exclaimed Big White.

Fisticuffs never was the red man's notion of a fight. I told the chief:

"I do not take a knife to a squaw. I use a stick, or my empty hand. This man can not be killed in the village, but he can be whipped. After he has been whipped the flag he hung over the lodge shall come down. The man who has been whipped has no right to raise a flag."

I felt that I was regaining the lost ground. The white voice yelled in English—

"Knock the —— spots off'n him!"

Shahaka was in a quandary. He was friendly to me and to all Americans. He remembered the Great White Chief's hospitality in having him out to Monticello to look over the collection of Indian weapons and relics. He knew something of the republic's bigness, although his descriptions had been accepted by his people as so many grotesque tales.

Balise slipped a hand to his belt. In place of the long knife he carried a short one. Richardson leaned forward and warned him—

"Touch that blade and I'll split your heart."

"It is a white man's fight," muttered the chief.

"You hear him, Balise. Go out and pull down the flag, or else take a drubbing."

And I stepped through the doorway.

With the snarl of a wildcat he followed me, and as we pushed our way through the curious, expectant group he grated:

"After all, perhaps *m'sieur* has made the mistake. One does not always like to fight like a wild animal even when one can fight that way. But, truce or no truce, I warn you I have killed men with my bare hands and will kill you."

"If you do, Richardson will twist your head off."

Then in the Mandan tongue I loudly boasted:

"You will not kill me. You kill from behind, not face to face."

And I flung out my hands for room.

TO BE CONTINUED

# AUBREY'S FAMOUS RIDES

## by Edwin L. Sabin

FRANCIS X. AUBREY, an adventurous French Canadian out of St. Louis, was an early day freighter upon the old Santa Fé Trail, with headquarters at Santa Fé. In 1852 he wagered that he could ride horseback from Santa Fé to Independence, Missouri, eight hundred miles, in ten days. And that he did, making the trip in a trifle over eight days, but pretty well used up at the end.

The next year, 1853, he again wagered, this time one thousand dollars, that he could ride the eight hundred miles within eight days. And that he did, and more; for his time was only five days, sixteen hours.

Upon this trail as it was in the Fifties an automobile would be in straits to do the job with one driver constantly at wheel and throttle.

Aubrey was compelled to ride day and night, reckless of Indians. At times he was so stiff that he had to be lifted from the saddle. He killed a number of horses. His mare Nellie carried him one hundred and fifty miles without relay, and dropped.

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# A Sore Loser

## By GEORGES SURDEZ

*Author of "Three Prongs," "Hell's Halfway House," etc.*

BILL HANSON pushed on the swinging door and entered.

Sunday night and Carl's Bar Américain was crowded. The air clung to the skin. From the outside came the stench of the river mud-flats, mingled with the vinegarish smell of coarse wine, the flat odor of stale beer and tobacco smoke. No one noticed him as he took a seat by the door. Elbows propped on the table, he settled his big frame and watched, listened. An ageless woman was singing, prancing on a rickety stage—

*"Sous le ciel toujours pur*
*De la Côte d'Azur——"**

Bill recalled the Coast of the Mediterranean; Nice, with its glittering palaces, the indigo sea curling on the curves of the shore—a contrast with the Indo-Chinese landscape, the low, murky sky, and fogs dripping moisture over the rice-fields.

The singer stopped, smiled, revealing yellowed teeth as pathetic as the expanse of cheap cotton stocking exposed by the jauntily elevated skirt.

Bill turned his face away.

The crowd applauded noisily. There were merchant-seamen of all races, all nations. Conspicuous, among them, were several American bluejackets from the newly arrived cruiser in the harbor. When the applause died out there was a moment's silence. Bill heard the shuffling in the street, vague shouts. Through dingy panes, he could see the Chinamen from the neighboring town of Cholon elbowing the sailors from the harbor. Then the talking resumed, the thumping of the cards on the board, the clicking of glasses. The acetylene lamps, in their brackets, sputtered and hissed, throwing shadows on the leprous red walls, where festoons of plaster stood out like whitened skeleton bones. Here the flies crawled, leaving tiny traces from the dips in the drinks on the tables.

Flies were happy—they ate. How absurd to envy flies, Bill thought. And yet he had no money. There was nothing for him to do here tonight. And he could not summon the courage to borrow from his compatriots, the American sailors.

He was about to leave when Carl, the owner, appeared. Every one knew the story. He could not go back home—a murder. In the freemasonry of the place, Carl was safe. He was a Swiss of forty, with a heavy face and chalky complexion. He was always homesick, his eyes ever red from weeping. Being homesick, he was grouchy. Some misery does not love company. Carl, sad, was a solitary. Nevertheless, he sometimes showed pity.

Bill jostled his way through the crowd, heedless of the murmurs. The others

*"Under the ever blue sky of the Azure Coast!"



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relaxed into smiles. Not knowing he was weak from hunger, they saw only his great size and the huge fists dangling at his side.

"Thought you were gone," Carl remarked. He spoke English, as he did all languages, well. He was a potent genius, misdirected.

"My ship went without me——"

"Drunk?"

"Uh—I was in Cholon four days ago when it sailed, and did not get back in time."

Carl held up a thick forefinger.

"You should not drink so much."

Then, thinking that this remark was out of place in a saloon, he redeemed it.

"You should have gambled. At least, if you had lost your money, you wouldn't have lost your ship."

"I know—but it's done. I'll get another ship. Say, can you give me something to eat?"

Carl hesitated. This was a bad precedent.

"Here," he grunted, finally. "You can have this."

He pushed forward a plate on which were sausage and a slice of bread.

"This was left over," he explained, "and was lost anyway."

He belied the apparent harshness by pouring out a glass of beer.

Bill took the glass and the plate.

"How can I get some money?" he asked, casually.

Carl shook his head. "I'll see," he replied.

Bill went back to the table. The sausage was cold, the bread hard, but Bill did not notice much. He munched away quietly.

The frugal meal finished, he stayed. He had no other place to go.

No other place to go—he had no home.

Four years ago he had a home and a business. Bill Hanson had been a mechanic in a garage. He had been happy, cheerful, had friends, relatives. Then he had fallen in love. Strange to say, love, which is a most exhilarating feeling, has the power to cause the most unhappiness. For every happy moment given to some by love, others have suffered three times as long. Bill reflected that the girl was now perfectly happy. His rival was with her. To them the episode had been a passing thing—to him a point of departure.

The girl had lived next door—the old story. She was fresh, eighteen, averagely beautiful, not over-intelligent. Bill, maddened by the new sentiment, had deified her, been willing to sacrifice all to get her. She had met his advances cordially, encouraged him. Then, as always, the rival appeared, a sailor, visiting the town on leave. His courtship had been impetuous, and the timid Bill had not declared himself before his coming.

The girl had found herself with two suitors and, naturally enough, played with both. It is a little privilege that always should be granted women. As cats, they love to play with their prey. Not that the young lady was particularly to be despised.

She reacted to as normal impulse as Bill. He loved because he was a man—she played with him and the other because she was woman. Power is a gratifying sensation, and a young woman, given power, will use it, not always advisably, not wisely, but use it she will.

The situation—a girl, two men—became tense. It usually happens in triangles. Finally, the sailor, who wished to know whether he should reenlist, or stay, called on the young lady during Bill's visits. There had been the usual embarrassed silence, the shuffling, coughing, brave attempt on the girl's side to create conversation. Then the sailor blurted out—

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"I've got to know!"

The object of this controversy looked from one to the other and decided she could not decide. As long as she saw both, she liked both. The one she was with she liked the best. Very understandable, but though every man has an instinctive understanding for polygamy the one who comprehends polyandry had never been met with. So from tense, the situation became tenser. A tension will last just so long, then snap, violently.

Something had to break.

That evening Bill and his rival, Ed Cliff, had attempted to outstay each other, with the result that they each got out at the same time, when decency, and the thumping of father's shoes, announced that sleep was required even by much sought-after girls. On the street, they had glared at each other. They were of a size, big, strong, resolute. Bill was calmer by nature, and avoided an immediate conflict. He felt that he had time on his side. The other might reenlist, then, with a free field, he would win.

Though they hated each other they could not seem to separate, for some mysterious reason, and went into a night restaurant and ate. Love, of all the emotions, contrary to general belief, creates appetite, when indulged in intensely, and rivalry paused before platters of pancakes.

Being fed, they had talked the matter over. They decided to see a mutual friend, ask his advice. So, without hesitating, with that sublime disregard for others that love creates in men, they had gone to the friend. He was awake, and ready to give advice. His first reaction was a peal of laughter, then good-natured chaffing. He was a short dapper fellow, who affected blue serge suits with tight trousers. Add a derby hat and a suit-case and you have seen him a dozen times, on junction lines, representing gums and hair-lotions. He could talk—his profession.

"Now—" he had paused and looked from one to the other speculatively. "You both want the girl, uh? Good—I don't blame you a bit. There is only one girl. There are two of you. One has to beat it, withdraw his candidacy, as it were—get me? Yes? Good! Bill, do you want to give up?"

Bill stared in surprize.

"No—I——"

"Good," the friend exclaimed. "And you?" he addressed the other.

"No—I'll be——"

"Agreed."

The friend paused, crossed one leg over the other and lighted a cigaret.

"Listen; shall I toss up a coin?"

He drew a quarter silver piece from his watch pocket, twirled it in his fingers.

"What do you say?"

"I say no," declared Bill. "She's too fine a girl to——"

"You bet," agreed Cliff.

"Then do you want to shoot craps to settle it?" The short man's flippancy annoyed both, and a quarrel was narrowly averted.

"Well," remarked the arbiter. "Suppose you suggest a better way. I don't care how you come to a decision, anyway. Say, Bill, how tall are you? What's your weight?"

"Six one—a hundred and eighty."

"And you?"

"Six—about the same weight."

Watson, the friend, smiled calmly.

"I don't know why you came to me then; it would be different if one of you was a weak runt like me."

"You mean—" started Bill.

"Of course! That's what I wanted to do first," asserted Cliff.

Bill shrugged. Well, what did it matter? He had no doubt as to his ability to win. The man in his mental condition has the strength—or thinks he has—to move mountains.

"I'm game," he said. "But how will that settle it?"

"The one who gets licked should leave town in the morning; give the other fellow free play. Is that agreed?"

"Yes," the sailor said.

Bill nodded.

"You better get a man to referee in case any one gets hurt," Watson advised. "You know what I mean—saves trouble."

"What about you?" Bill asked.

"Can't. Got an important trip in the morning."

"Maybe you'll tell us who will?" Bill went on.

"No, all the guys around here talk a lot, and it would hurt her reputation," Cliff put in.

Yes, nothing must be done to hurt her. They both asserted this loudly. They would not trust any one but Watson.

"Sorry," he said. "I can't. I'll be gone a long time. You'll have to leave me out of it, unless—" he seemed struck by a sudden thought—"unless you settle it tonight."

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"Tonight!" Bill exclaimed. "It's one o'clock, at least."

"I don't care," Cliff growled. "I'll fight any time. If you back out now you can get out of the way."

"Now, where could we go?" Watson suggested.

After a long drawn-out discussion, it was decided that they should repair to an empty shed near the railroad station. The place was not guarded, and lighted pretty well by the arc-lights outside. As a kid, Bill had often played there. The sailor had no objections, seemed sullen, resolute.

The trio marched out into the silent streets. The men about the station were sleepy and did not even raise their eyes when they passed. Upon entrance, Watson pushed his derby to the back of his head and stamped on the cement floor.

"Hard," he remarked.

Then he proceeded to prepare for the bout. The two were for going at it immediately, but he persuaded them that they should remove coats and collars. The sailor stripped to his underwear, and so did Bill. He would always remember the queer, unreal scene in the half-light. He had been very calm, sure of himself. He could accomplish anything for her, was as big as the other. So what had he to fear?

Watson gave the word.

From then on recollection was dim. Bill had gone down with the first punch. Bill was not a boxer, the other was. The entire story lay in that. After hitting the cement floor once Bill was not much good. His arms and back were bruised, his eyes misty. Punch after punch landed on his face, and soon the blood came. He gave back punches, well-meant, but badly delivered, punches that struck glancingly or were lost in the empty air.

Minutes had dragged by.

His nose was smashed, his lips cut. Then the sailor had shifted the attack to the body. The blows had come like hammer- beats, to the pit of his stomach, blows that jarred him, nauseated him, made him reel with pain. Even Watson begged him to give in. Savagely he had sprung forward, and once, through sheer luck, had struck squarely with a swing. The sailor had gone down in his turn, stunned. There was to be no count. The man to lose was the one who gave up first.

The fight resumed.

Cliff gained his feet, coolly defended himself until collected. Then, enraged, he had attacked fiercely, with more speed than he had shown before. Mercilessly he had pumped blows into Bill's body. One, two, one, two—from right and left the smashes had come—until Bill, totally blinded and bewildered, had forgotten where he was, what he was doing, whom he was fighting for, and thought of only one thing—to end the fight, to stop the pain that numbed him. How to go about it—

Toward the end, Bill's brain had cleared somewhat, and he had seen the keen, red face of his opponent close to him, the eyes narrowed to slits, the muscular shoulders working. He no longer felt the blows, just swayed with the impacts, fell, gained his feet, thinking, thinking how to end it. He did not even have the presence of mind to stay down. He wanted to get up and explain, to say he had enough.

Then he had clenched, wrestled. There, his superior muscular strength had told, and he had put his enemy down, scrambling on the floor. The self-appointed referee had watched casually, not interfering, even when the two passed from punching to wrestling, from wrestling to kicking and gouging. Suddenly Cliff had rolled himself on top, seized his ears and vigorously thumped his skull on the cement floor. One, twice— then bells had rung, there had been a rush of blood to his head that seemed to explode in his brain. He must have fainted.

Watson went for water, washed him, then led him home. He remembered packing a suit-case, then walked to the station in the early morning, just as the sun first glinted along the steel tracks and shone redly in the station windows. The train chugging away—while the trees fleeted by, the curiously staring passengers—hours. Then his arrival in New York, the search for a job, his bruised face against him. He had known great hunger for the first time. The cheapest boarding-houses on the waterfront, he sought out. From there to the ships was but a step.

He had crossed the Atlantic as an oiler, had traveled up and down the Mediterranean on a tramp, gone through from Marseilles to India, from Ceylon to Singapore, from Singapore to Nagasaki, and from thence Saigon. From ship to ship, from port to port, he had gone on for years. And

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now, back in Saigon, he was stranded, had lost his ship. The days had gone by, his money had melted away. Carl had proved to be a patient friend. But this last episode, missing a ship for the third time, had been a little too much.

Bill sighed.

THE heat, and the sudden sense of well-being had made him drowsy. He closed his eyes, forgot his trouble, and listened to the tickling of the rickety piano playing an old waltz. The suave strains lulled him, and he very nearly went to sleep. After his fast of several hours the food had tasted good, the beer was refreshing. He had that most precious of all qualities—the ability to appreciate the happiness of the moment. He voluntarily shut out the evil thoughts that flocked, wish for revenge against the girl, wish for revenge against Cliff. He would get a ship and go home. Once home, it would take several months to get on his feet financially, to enable him to pick up the business where he had left it.

In the meanwhile he must live, earn money here in Saigon to keep himself until the expected berth could be found. He had no knowledge of office work, therefore could not enter a commercial house. And as manual labor could be had from the natives for a few francs a month, there was no chance for him. Detached from the problem, he considered the situation calmly, without fear, as if discussing with himself something not affecting himself. He even found it pleasant.

"Never say die," he muttered. "Things are darkest before dawn."

Some one touched him on the shoulder. He turned to face Carl.

"Bill," the Swiss began. "You box, don't you?"

"A little."

"The Americans over there have a man who offered fifty dollars to any man in the place who can beat him. His friends back him up. Now if there's a box fight here, I'll shut the doors and windows, ask three piasters a piece from everybody to stay and watch—all will. I'll give you ten per cent. if you win, and half the bets collected. And I'll bet on you——"

"Why?"

"One of my waiters was in Cholon the night you cleaned out the Lotus Flower, and he says you beat ten men."

Bill had always been ashamed of the drunken brawl. An insult, a blow, then ten or twelve sailors piled on him and he fought his way out. But now, a trained man could easily defeat him in spite of his great strength. Carl did not know that. That was Carl's business. He might win. If he lost he would lose little. One beating more or less did not matter. If he won—He decided it was worth taking a chance.

"And if I lose?" he asked cautiously.

"You'll get nothing! I'll lose on the bets. Anyway, I don't think he's quite as big as you. I'm a good picker. That's my business. It brings me quite a bit of cash."

"All right," Bill agreed.

He had picked up boxing on the ships. Though not above the average he was far from being the lumbering fellow who had got the worst of the fight back home. And he was hard.

"I'll give you some good food right now," Carl suggested. "It's ten o'clock, and I won't close the doors until eleven."

Bill shook his head.

"No, I don't want to eat heavily just before. Give me a regular drink."

Carl sent a passing boy to the bar.

"Say," added the owner. "The whole bunch here will bet on you, so if you lose you'd better go out through the back door. They're sore losers."

"I'll remember."

"I'll send word up-town. There are many officers who like boxing, and I'll get in a policeman or two to save appearances."

Carl walked away.

Bill thought it over. If he won, he could start at once for home. If he lost he would keep to the sea. This would decide the question. He was awake now.

He went to the wash-room, dipped his face in cold water, loosened his collar, relaxed. He was curious as to his opponent, but decided to wait until he stepped out to fight. It was best thus. There would be no worrying, no moral effect. Probably the fellow was a bit drunk.

He could hear the buzzing in the hall as the news spread. The fights staged in Carl's bar were usually worth seeing. Bill recalled one, between a huge Finn and a lean Englishman. When the Finn had weakened the crowd had gone against him, and no one had been able to ward off the

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rain of bottles that followed him as he made his exit. The real danger was not in the fight, but in the losing.

Bill had heard of "wrecks" in England, who fought rats with their teeth to get money. He realized that tonight even such an offer would have tempted him. He laughed at the contrast of this impulse to fight—anything, with that which had sent him into his first serious fight.

Then he had fought for a woman. Now he fought for food.

He had read stories, telling how such and such a prize-fighter had started boxing to save the old folks from disaster, or to furnish funds for the operation that was to enable the life-long crippled sweetheart to walk. He was more selfish. He was fighting for himself, for his stomach.

After all, his world was himself. He had cut off from everybody. To fight for himself was as worthy as to fight for any one else, because he had only himself to love.

He looked at his shoes. They were heavy soled, and would drag. The floor of the bar was smooth, and would not hurt his feet. He smiled as he saw his toes protruding from the worn woolen socks.

"A case where the face pays for the feet!" he remarked.

The drink had given him a false strength. He realized he shouldn't have taken it, but the temptation had been too great.

"Whether I win or not," he decided. "I'm not going to get tight any more."

It was rather late for contrition. But it is always the way. Remorse comes after the full effects of folly have made themselves manifest.

"HEY, Bill." Carl came to him. "It's eleven o'clock."

Bill was suddenly struck with a sense of futility. Suppose he was beaten, then assaulted by the crowd. What would he have gained? No, it was not worth while.

"It's all off," he said.

Carl looked at him silently for a moment, then indicated the other room.

"I've got everybody here. You've got to go through with it."

"But you've got to give me something even if I lose," Bill demanded pleadingly.

Carl looked at him. In spite of the Swiss' red face and pouchy stomach, Bill saw the iron beneath the fat. He realized that to get out he'd have to cross the bar. He must take his chance. He followed Carl.

The shutters had been set up, the door locked. The center of the room, cleared of tables and chairs, was swept clean. At the "ring-side" sat several gold-laced officers, while, leaning against the front entrance were two policemen—big white men, with dangling swords and long mustaches. Bill had always regarded with scorn these ex non-coms commanding the native police. Now they looked formidable. He dare not make a break for the door. Corsicans were not amiable when riled.

He stepped into the center of the open space and stood still. The crowd shouted encouragement. Perhaps they were pleased at sight of his tall heavy body and red hair.

"Bill Hanson," shortly announced Carl.

More cheers. The atmosphere was tense.

Besides the regular admission price, Carl in a flash of genius, took a bread-basket in his hand and demanded extra reward for the winner. The silver piasters mingled with the notes. The crowd, in the moment of excitement, had lost a sense of value and would have given away almost anything to hasten the procedure.

Bill breathed deeply. The draft of air that entered his lungs sickened him. He found difficulty in calming himself—felt his heart thumping against his ribs. An elderly officer, whose gaunt face, bright eyes, and small beard reminded one of a musketeer, aroused further enthusiasm by depositing several gold coins in the basket.

All was ready.

Carl nodded to the group of American sailors. The challenger stepped forward.

"What name?"

"Cliff," replied the man.

"Champion of the Asiatic Squadron," screamed one of his friends, and the group broke into cheers.

Bill started at the name. He lifted his eyes.

Yes, it was Ed Cliff!

Coincidence?

Every one has noticed how certain events will re-occur in life; how some person will always turn up at the right, or wrong, moment; how Fate, with a grin on her face, will bide her time to spring the unexpected, to accomplish the impossible.

For four years Fate had guided Bill, taken him to Indo-China. For four years Fate had guided Cliff, moved the plans of naval

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commanders, sent ships to various emplacements of the world, to bring the two old rivals face to face. The unexpected is always improbable. A man steps out of his house, follows the sidewalk, approaches a certain corner. A clumsy workman may drop a tile. The tile hits the man. Is anything more coincidental? There is the largest room for miscarrying. The tile might have fallen at any other minute of any other hour. The tile had, within the same hour, three thousand five hundred and ninety-nine seconds to miss its aim, and yet chose the exact second when the man was passing. Fate. Is it any stranger that Cliff should turn up, thousands of miles from the first place of meeting, to impede Bill's success, to sap his resolution? Another grim joke of Fate.

Bill felt like a trapped animal. The prospect of facing once again the flaying fists that had beaten him down to a cement floor time after time, was appaling. The man who gets killed attempting a deed, thereby failing, is no less a man than he who succeeds. He has done his best. No one can do better. Without entering into the conscious psychology of the thing, Bill decided that he would "go down" in any case.

He could not tell whether Cliff had recognized him. The other's face was impassive, deadly calm, not even a quiver of the lips. And there was no hint of alcoholic befuzzlement in the brown eyes that peered from the sides of the straight massive nose.

The two stripped to the waist. Carl, who was to referee, sat on a chair, watch in hand. There would be an attempt to keep rules—rounds of three minutes each, four-ounce boxing-gloves, battered, the leather peeling off, between Carl's puffy lips a whistle which would mark the start and end of each round. Cliff's companions noisily offered bets which were immediately covered. Bill's exploit in Cholon had created a sensation, and many believed in him. Surely, was the general reasoning, a man who could beat ten could clean up one. Lack of knowledge again. Ignorance, while not an excuse, explains many things.

The whistle blew.

Bill got up swiftly. From the opposite side charged Cliff. Bill had learned enough to side-step. He did, and crossed his right with commendable speed for the face. Cliff ducked but not in time to avoid the blow altogether, which caught him on the skull above the ear and rolled him over like a stunned rabbit.

When Cliff regained his feet Bill followed his advantage, punched away with great swings to the body, and Cliff went down once again. The crowd jeered the challenger, cheered Bill.

Cliff rose, rushed again. Bill hesitated a fraction too long. The faces, the lights, shuttered windows, mingled together in one huge fly-wheel that spun in the air and seemed to explode. He did not fall. It might have been better if he had, for he stood there without enough presence of mind to block or strike. Cliff set to work.

In spite of the renewed punching, Bill's head cleared. Cliff was excited. The whipcord release of the first punch could not be immediately repeated. As in a dream Bill pulled himself back to his senses. First, the mist that had gathered before him began to clear; then from it emerged Cliff's face, tense, savage, lips parted, showing strong teeth. Bill was not certain where he was. Was this the shed? No, there were too many people here, shouting annoyingly. He struck out blindly. He landed. Something gave way.

A whistle.

He felt himself dragged to a seat. Water fell over his face, refreshed him. On the chair opposite him, across the open space, Cliff's friends busily attended to his bleeding mouth.

Bill did not know how much he had learned of boxing. As he stepped out again into the open space, the blocking and punching seemed to come naturally to him. Cliff attacked furiously, madly. With every calm move of Bill, Cliff became more and more angry. The rounds succeeded one another.

Bill laughed as he came in place for the sixth.

There was nothing to fear now. Cliff's eyes were swollen, his nose badly smashed. He, Bill, was bruised in many places, but his wind was sound, his face unmarked.

Then Cliff suddenly changed tactics. Instead of a rush that could be picked off he began a deliberate attack. With the first blow that crashed into his stomach squarely, Bill realized the danger. He remembered those blows. He attempted to stand off. Something unexplainable had happened. For the past two rounds Cliff had worked altogether for the face, and Bill, in a cool,

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collected way, had picked off the punches. Cliff feinted for his face. Bill instinctively raised his arms, leaving his stomach open. His ribs resounded with thumps that seemed on the point of rattling his lungs loose, of tearing his heart from its place. He was pushed back to the tables. As if in a dream he heard some one offer ten to one that he would not last a round more.

The round was perhaps half-over when Cliff eased his attack somewhat and began talking. Up to now he had been silent, business-like. He looked up and his thick lips contorted in a weird smile.

"Well, Bill Hanson."

"You know me?" Bill questioned foolishly.

"You bet I do!" Cliff playfully dug his right into Bill's ribs. "I got mad when I saw you," he went on. "Say, you're pretty good now, not good enough, though——"

Bill blocked another punch and skipped back.

"Well, well," grunted Cliff with an amused grin.

"Say, Cliff—you had what—you wanted—if you—win—can you stake me to get home," he pleaded, gaspingly. "Be—a good—fellow——"

Cliff stopped short, and regardless of the staring crowd, spoke rapidly:

"You ——" he cursed. "Stake you—after you didn't keep to your bargain!"

"What do you mean?" Bill, too, put down his hands.

"I gave you the licking of your life—and you went to—her—played on her sympathy—ran away in the morning with her——"

The crowd was jeering now and pieces of food were dropping about, preceding the possible rain of bottles. Neither heeded.

"Left—with me," Bill mumbled, stupidly.

"Yes!"

"With—me!"

Bill could not assimilate the meaning. What had happened? Had she, the object of the fight, disappeared the next morning? The four intervening years rolled back. He recalled the entire episode—the grinning Watson, his derby, his serge suit.

"Wrong!" he shouted. "She didn't come with me, Cliff—she went with Watson!"

"Not with you!"

"No, I swear it."

"Gosh!" Cliff exclaimed, and dropped his hands.

Bill, who needed money, who wanted to go home, who had two beatings to remember saw the unprotected jaw. Not ethical—but necessary.

"Good-by." Carl offered his hand. "The boat for Nagasaki leaves in an hour.

"Good-by. Can I do anything for you?"

Carl shook his head. His eyes were thoughtful, as if he gazed over the entire immensity of Asia toward home.

"No," he said. "Home doesn't come by parcel post."

The swinging door shut.

BILL HANSON has a garage now. He is married, has children. He eats three times a day. He is fairly happy, as happy as most men. But he annoys his wife by recalling the excellent cooking of Carl's kitchen and by attending boxing-matches with his friend Ed Cliff.

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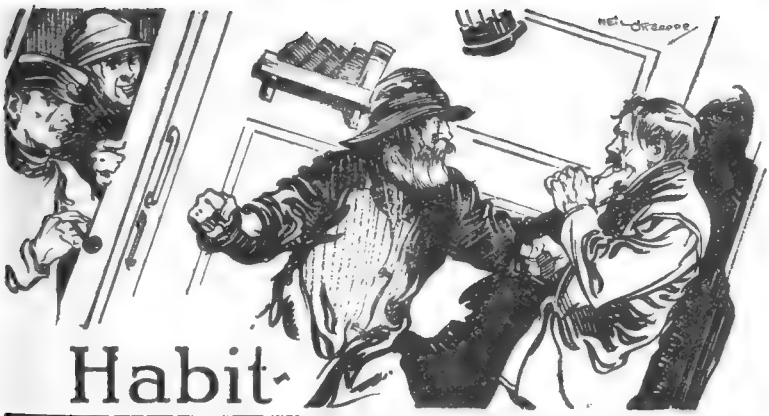

# Habit

## By F. R. BUCKLEY

*Author of "Kavanagh the Florentine," "King High," etc.*

TO BE a sailor, and to see the *Elizabeth Wakelin* at her pier, was to smile and shake one's head—until one perceived Captain "Tam-Tammas" Weatherfield sliding down the rickety brass rail of the bridge-house ladder with his disengaged fist clenched. Then to be a wise man was to stop smiling and sheer off; and of all those who had smiled at the *Elizabeth Wakelin* in her captain's presence, only one had not proved wise in the last analysis—a New Bristol longshoreman, more used to the ways of ward-bosses than of deep-water masters. At the time this story opens, he was lying in the Mercy Hospital, groaning occasionally and wondering whether the doctors had lied when they said his nose would set straight.

The ship did, in point of fact, offer some excuse for merriment. She was thirty years old, had known much sorrow, and was at present in the hands of owners to whom a paint bill was about as welcome as a Grand Jury indictment. Her hull, accordingly, was covered with a pea-green that had gone ropy in storage; her upperworks with a violent blue whose manufacturers had deservedly gone bankrupt; while her funnel, which demanded the popular colors of red and yellow, had for the last five years exhibited them only in the form of rust.

Furthermore, having been built before grain-chutes, electric traveling-cranes, and dock-side railways were thought of, the *Elizabeth* carried her winches, hatch-covers, and derricks in positions which, to be poetic, gave her the general appearance, in port, of a plain woman with her hair all over her face. At sea, to carry on the simile, a propeller several sizes too large for her, and a counter several sizes too small, gave her the perpetual look of stumbling over her skirts.

As the former second officer had told the present second while introducing him to his room at New Bristol, the *Elizabeth* was either the first or the last thing God ever made—probably the first. It was the former second officer's opinion, in fact, that she was the model upon which Noah improved when he built the Ark.

"She won't steer," he had informed his successor, as he detached his razor-strop from the doorpost and reached for a photograph which was pasted to the dingy ceiling above his bunk, "she won't steam, she don't carry any sails, she'll roll forty degrees in a seaway as soon as look at you, and if you let on to the old man that she hasn't got the *Olympic* blowing short blasts, as like as not he's into you with the parallel rulers."

"He's just after doin' seven days for slugging a 'shoreman that laughed at her,

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isn't he?" asked the new second with interest.

"Came back last night. Now he's in his cabin, broodin'. He's a Christian or somep'n when he's at home, an' this is the first time he ever was in jail in his life. It's weighin' on his mind. Though I tell you, mister, I been with him two trips, an' it's God's mercy he isn't in the cold, cold ground long since, let alone in the cooler. Four times I seen him start down the pier after somebody that'd smiled at the tub. It's a habit with him. An' off the Azores, when a British cruiser signaled to ask if we were under command, he laid alongside and wanted the captain to come aboard an' fight it out in a bunker."

"Don't he know she's rotten?" asked Mr. Connelly, digging an emaciated Bible out of his bag and laying it where it would be handy.

"I dunno. Anyway, he won't admit it. He's been with this line fifty years or somep'n, an' the sons of guns rewarded his faithful etceteras by sellin' him a twentieth share of the ship or somep'n for the nominal price of about twelve thousand smackers he'd saved. 'Course, he loves her. O gee, ain't he careful of her! Comes up pretty nigh every watch to see you ain't runnin' her on the beach or anything— You know you got grain this trip?"

Connelly nodded. Grain, in a forty-degree roller and a North Atlantic December, has an amusing way of turning the ship bottom upward.

"Well then, good-by!" said Mr. Hill with unnecessary solemnity.

IT WAS of the grain that Mr. Connelly was thinking, four days later, while the *Elizabeth* alternately drove her nose and port-rail under the green seas of a raging north-east hurricane. Subsidiary to this thought, about on a level of intensity with his annoyance that his forehead was frozen to his sou'wester and that his hip-boots were filled with a mixture of ice and salt-water and that his eyes ached with being seven-eighths closed against the driving hail, was the second officer's resentment against the man who, in leaving, had represented Captain Weatherfield as a man of lunatic caution born of solicitude for his ship.

This hurricane would have jarred the rivets out of the *Elizabeth* even if she had had to; it would have been likely to pull the teeth out of her if there had been an attempt to ride with a sea-anchor. And here was Tam-Tammas Weatherfield, his ship already swept clean of everything moveable except one boat—and of several things not generally considered so, including the wireless house—driving her nose-foremost into seas that threatened to push her stem through her shaft-tunnel, with the idea of rescuing the crew of a well-decker tramp which lay broad abeam with her ensign upside down.

It may be said at once that the *Elizabeth's* grain did not shift. So many of the things we fear most never happen. But:

"Why ain't you on the bridge?" snapped a voice at the second's elbow. "Is the wheel-house the place to navigate from?"

"I ain't navigating. First officer's there."

"Say sir, when you speak to me," said Tam-Tammas Weatherfield. "O Lord, O Lord, my whiskers are frozen. I can't see him."

"He's away to starb'd, behind all the dodger that hasn't carried away."

"'Sir,'" said Tam-Tammas Weatherfield.

His aged blue eyes, waggishly overhung by a cake of ice, fixed upon the face of the second. Mr. Connelly overtopped his commander by at least two feet, undercut him by nearly fifty years, and was in an extremely rebellious temper. However, he repeated the title.

"I'm glad you said that," the captain informed him, keeping the eye fixed while he experimented tenderly with his ice-embalmed whiskers. "You might as well understand now as later, mister, that what I says's to be done will be done; and if you think I'm crazy, you'd better keep the opinion to yourself. I'm goin' to the assistance of that ship because she's of New Bristol register, and it was New Bristol that put me in jail; an' I'm goin' to clear my record with New Bristol—see? I've got daughters in the State of Maine that ain't goin' to get the idea that their dad's a violent man. If you got any arguments to make, make 'em. I've just smashed the third mate's face for arguing about an oil-slick, an' I'm ready to smash yours."

Mr. Connelly's jaw dropped.

"Very well," said Mr. Weatherfield, still pugnacious. "Did the first officer rig those oil-pipes through the hawse-holes?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Then you can get forrard an' see if you can dig up enough men to man a boat. You try your hardest, mister, because if none of 'em 'll volunteer, you an' me an' the rest of the officers 'll man her, an' that'll leave nobody worth a curse to bring the ship around to loo'ard and pick us up again. Get me?"

Closing his lips again, the second found them dry.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"All right, then."

And Tam-Tammas Weatherfield crouched his way out on to the naked bridge, across which the hurricane was now driving not hail in the usual sense of the word, but jagged fragments of ice that cut like flying glass.

Half an hour's steady grinding of the *Elizabeth's* engines, aided by two partial lulls in the gale, had advanced the ship half a mile, so that the disabled steamer from New Bristol lay astern—under the *Elizabeth's* lee, and in the outskirts of the smoother oil-slick which the rusty tramp had shed from bow and stern.

But neither lee nor oil seemed to have power to mitigate the beat of the storm on the *Johannes'* high gray sides. Her engines were out of commission, her boats were gone—her propeller had raced, flown off its boss, and wrecked the rudder. Only a rag of jury-sail in the stern kept her bow from swinging south to destruction; and when that rag blew out of its makeshift bolt-ropes, most assuredly she would broach-to and founder. She was in ballast, and already, as she flirted with the trough of the seas, the flare of her red underside, sometimes bare almost to the garboard, showed through the blinding sleet like the danger-signal it was.

"Clear away the boat," said Captain Weatherfield through the side of his mouth that was not frozen.

The ice on the right corner gave way as the first officer stood staring. The immediate increase in the volume of the old man's voice was startling; but it was the eyes above the mouth that made the first officer jump for the bridge ladder—which, incidentally, chose this moment to give way, and let him down sprawling on the ice-sheeted deck. The eyes were mild in color, but their expression was such as to make the captain's words seem very gentle. And the words were—

"You clear away that boat, an' get her filled with men inside of five minutes, or I'll come an' kick your stiff backbone through your brains, mister!"

There was ice in the chocks; the axes had been carried away when the carpenter had gone overboard. He had been at work securing this boat with all the lashings of the other boats, and he had been sucked over the side by just such a sea as now tore at the waists of the first officer and the three men who were helping him. The water gone, one of them found a maul, jammed between chocks and davit, and with it cracked ice off the falls. In that wind, which flattened even the sound of the crash of the seas against the *Elizabeth's* bow, the first officer's bull voice was perfectly inaudible. So was that of the second, when he appeared on the boat-deck with a belaying-pin in his hand and four staggering, murderously terrified forecastle hands in front of him.

Yet Tam-Tammas Weatherfield, whose vocal organs must have been proportioned to his height of five feet three, in addition to being seventy-two years old and largely hidden by masses of frappé gray side-whiskers, managed to make himself heard from the bridge.

"Get her over!" came his words, like the ghost of a baby's voice. "All those men an' an officer! Git to it!"

Connelly and the first looked at each other. The first roared visibly but inaudibly. A furious sea washed officers and men sickeningly against the boat, and rushed away, leaving eight men clinging where there had been nine. Then the first officer, reverting to signs, indicated the wedding-ring finger of his left hand and raised his eyebrows questioningly. Connelly nodded. So did the first.

They were no nearer a solution of the problem of which should go, when, on the tail of another sea, Tam-Tammas Weatherfield arrived.

"Lower away!" he ordered, his voice swelled by his nearness. "Get out of my way, misters. I'm runnin' this show, an' you get paid off next port. Lower away, you dum-blanked lot of cowyards!"

The falls had frozen stiff again, the blocks were jammed with ice. It was Weatherfield, this time, who swung the maul, and in his furious attack he split one of the blocks. That meant that the boat was liable

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to take the water nose-first, and be swamped within the second. Yet the six seamen did not hesitate to clamber aboard—between the captain and the deep sea, they unanimously chose the latter.

At the last moment, Connelly offered to go.

"Stay aboard an' give us a lee. Keep that oil goin' while you work around to loo'ard, an' have a boom rigged to take us up the side," snapped the skipper. "Lower away, you women! This is my job, anyway."

Considering his alleged motive for the rescue of the New Bristol men, doubtless it was his job; and well he handled it. To be sure, all he did in point of actual work was to sit in the stern of the shuttle-cocked boat, yelling "Pull!" when some breaker that had escaped the oil reared its rime-crisped crest above them. But he handled the job. The men straining at the oars gathered from that hunched figure with the eyes, the incontrovertible conviction that those oars must be pulled, and pulled to the last ounce. Even the stroke, who was a Pole new to the sea, and was convinced that the old man with the background of booming, tearing, ice-spitting northern sky was the devil in person, dared not take time to cross himself.

There are some recitals of difficulty overcome which inspire humanity with pride in itself; there are others that should be suppressed, lest the race of man stare brazenly at the heavens and demand why it was spawned on such a world.

So let it be said that the *Elizabeth's* boat got under the stern of the *Johannes* of New Bristol—that the eight men and three officers left of the crew of twenty-seven jumped blindly—that two men each from boat and ship were drawn into the lashing gray mystery and drowned—and that the boat returned, the rescued men spelling the rowers. Captain Weatherfield took the place of the Pole, whose forearm had been pinched off when the boat had grazed the *Johannes'* plates, and who was accordingly fit only to moan—and bail.

The captain of the *Johannes* lay along the bottom-boards, his face awash, a pink froth about his lips. He had so far forgotten the etiquette of the sea as to jump first, before his officers and men. He had come down with his chest across the boat's gunwale; and now his third officer, rowing, was spurning his head with a sea-boot, quite deliberately, at each stroke. The third officer of the *Johannes* was laughing all the way down-wind to the *Elizabeth:* which was appalling, considering that his face was frozen immovable, and that warm tears were cutting runnels through the salt ice-crust on his cheeks.

It was very annoying, too, when at last they had hoisted him aboard in a bowline, at the imminent risk of death to the men who manned the line, and to those who were delayed in the boat below, to have him say "Alice!" and stretch out his arms and fling himself over the rail.

Captain Tam-Tammas Weatherfield remarked on this very severely before his seventy-two years and his six hours in the rescue boat presented their bill and stretched him fainting across the engine-room hatch.

LEFT to her own devices by the simultaneous breaking down of her captain and her engines, the *Elizabeth* seemed to come to a compromise with the hurricane, and made better weather of it. She turned her quarter to the seas, and made incredible leeway instead of taking them over the deck; and in return for a continual run of oil from her waste-pipes, the ocean abandoned its favorite trick of holding her up by the bow and stern while it removed its support from her amidships. So that quite a lot of her plates remained in position, considering, and she made no more than the six inches of water an hour, which she had made at three in the afternoon. Which was as well, since her hand-pumps had leaky plungers, and the pipe which should have been supplying steam to the bilge-pumps was temporarily incapable of supplying anything but scalds and excuses for the chief engineer's profanity.

Captain Weatherfield's coma had long since passed into a heavy sleep when, in the pitch darkness which had overtaken the ship when the dynamos had died of inanition, the third officer with the smashed face shook him awake.

"Cap'n Miller's dying," said the third, holding on to the washstand.

"'Sir!'" added a thick voice from the invisible bunk.

"'Sir!'" it snapped more clearly an instant later.

"Sir," said the third mate.

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Captain Weatherfield swung his legs over the edge of the bunk.

"How's she heading?" he asked. "Where's the —— lights? What was it you said when you came in?"

"Cap'n Miller's dyin'. Wants to see you, sir. Think he wants to make a statement for the log. His first officer an' engineer say he lost the ship racin' for port. Held on full speed through the storm until she kicked off her propeller."

"No business of the first officer's," snapped Tam-Tammas, fumbling in the dark, "much less any —— engineer. Where's the matches?"

"He left the ship first," said the third officer.

A match sputtered, revealing the swaying form of Captain Weatherfield in the salt-crusted clothes he had worn to bed.

"An' that's no business of yours, young man," he said severely. "You ain't goin' to swear away his ticket."

"He's goin' to die any way."

"Oh, is he?" asked Tam-Tammas through his teeth. "Where've you got him?"

Captain Miller was lying on the mess-room settee, held from rolling to the floor by the backs of two chairs, and horribly illumined from above by an oil-lamp that swung wildly on its gimbals. The flickering yellow light, playing its array of shadows across his leaden face and bare chest seemed to increase the frequency of the spells of pain which tightened his lips, and to speed up his already rapid, tortured breathing.

"Evenin', cap'n," said Weatherfield gravely.

"— cap'n," whispered Miller of the *Johannes*.

There was a silence. Then Tam-Tammas laid a knotted hand gently to the awful bruised area on Miller's left side. The firm arch of the ribs was gone.

"Pain?" he asked.

The injured man nodded sickly.

"Seems — though — somethin' — sharp —stickin' into—lungs," he gasped. "Gettin'—worse."

A doctor would have nodded, and turned away to grimace at the nurse. Captain Weatherfield nodded, and remarked that the sharp thing was the end of a broken rib.

"What were you racin' for?" he asked in a low voice. "Go on. I'll look after your ticket. The third here's all right. Ain't you, Roberts?"

He had to bend close to catch Miller's words.

"Wife's — havin' — first baby — 'bout now."

"His wife," said Tam-Tammas Weatherfield to the third officer, "is thinkin' of having a baby."

He paused and considered. Then he went on, in a series of spoken reflections separated by long pauses, when the dying man's breath roared eerily.

"If that lung gets a hole in it, you'll sink."

The storm, veering, sent a harbinger-rattle of hail against the port. Captain Weatherfield remarked casually—

"I saw a surgeon, once, slash a guy an' take a rib out'n him.

"You got no chance now. If you want to take one, I'll try an' operate on you. Chloroform in the medicine-chest."

"My God!" said the third mate.

"You shut up," advised Captain Weatherfield calmly. "How about it, cap'n?"

The sick man nodded.

"Go an' fetch chloroform an' some disinfectants from the medicine-chest, mister," said Tam-Tammas without moving. "Get the first and second officers to witness his consent. Bring another lamp. Get that little knife out of the medicine-chest, too."

When the third was gone, his cheeks prickling as if his three-day growth of beard was trying to stand on end, Miller of the *Johannes* spoke again.

"Better let—die," he said. "Lost—ticket."

"Not yet," said Tam-Tammas Weatherfield grimly.

And there was silence until the first and third of the *Elizabeth* entered bearing the medical supplies. Connelly, his prominent blue pupils surrounded by a horrified ring of white, brought up the rear with a lamp from the chart-house.

Then Tam-Tammas arose.

"Who's in charge of the deck?" he asked. You better go back up, Mr. Roberts. Sea on her quarter, ain't it? Keep her so. Connelly, hang on to that lamp. You give him the chloroform, mister. Get 'round by his head. Take that napkin. Put it over his mouth and nose."

"His heart'll give way," whispered the anesthetist through a dry throat.



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"Got to risk it," said Captain Weatherfield.

Then, turning with a scalpel in his hand, he rolled up his right sleeve as if for any rough work in his own province, told Connelly to bring the lamp nearer, compressed his lips, and—operated.

There was no hot water; the peroxid and bichloride bottles, whose contents might have provided a rough sterilization of the knife, had long been emptied on minor cuts and sores; and even the chloroform bottle proved to be less than a quarter full. It was this last that caused the horrible moment when the surgeon, in the midst of his ghastly work, had to drop his scalpel and help his officers wrestle with the bloody, screaming man who tried to fight his way off the operating table.

"He's dead," said the first officer at last. "His heart's give way."

Weatherfield wiped his arms to the elbow on his trousers, and bent forward again.

"He ain't. Heart's still beatin'."

And then, through his teeth, as he fumbled on the floor for the scalpel:

*"I can see it."*

Connelly, still holding the lamp, became very sick where he stood.

"Ah!" whispered Tam-Tammas Weatherfield, and, dropping the scalpel, began to grope.

THEY got the main steam-pipe repaired the second day after that; the jarred bearings re-aligned, the high-pressure connecting-rod straightened, and the bilge-pumps re-animated, on the third; and their first useful sight of the sun at eight bells on the fourth. They found that the storm which had suddenly left them early that morning, had blown them south-west quite as fast as the *Elizabeth's* engines, in their present condition, could carry her back. This seemed to indicate that they would make New Bristol in a week.

In point of fact, however, it was fifteen days before they made a landfall—which was uncomfortable, in view of the fact that the storm had started the water-tanks, leaving short rations even for the weak. After that, it was condenser-water or nothing: which made all hands curse but Tam-Tammas Weatherfield. He had patronized the condenser from the first, giving his share of the tank-water to his patient, who, after three days of delirium and appalling hemorrhages, had made a miraculous recovery. In fact, when Tam-Tammas visited him on the morning of the day whose afternoon brought them within sight of land, he had been sufficiently recovered to sit up and curse his saviour weakly because the ex-rib had been slung overboard, instead of being saved for him to carve into a paper-knife.

It was immediately after this interview that Captain Weatherfield, breathing hard through his nose, invited his own first and third officers, and the first, chief-engineer, and bo'sun of the *Johannes*, to meet him in the chart-room. He had already spoken to Connelly, who was on the bridge, and received, after long and earnest argument, the cryptic answer—

"All right—if the rest'll back me up. Not otherwise."

" 'Sir!' "

"Sir."

The matter at issue was whether John Miller, late *S. S. Johannes*, should or should not hereafter be licensed as at present to command steamships of any gross tonnage on any ocean. Legally this issue was up to the Board of Inquiry. Actually, of course, it depended on the willingness of the men in the *Elizabeth's* chart-house to perjure themselves. Captain Weatherfield explained this, his blue eyes mild and his voice bumping along in its usual compass between A flat and C.

"If that's it," sneered Larsen, the former first of the *Johannes*, "you'd better have let him die."

" 'Sir!' " said Captain Weatherfield.

"Go to ——!"

It could not possibly have been the captain's rising from his seated height of four feet to his standing altitude of fifteen inches more that made the big man by the doorway obey the order to return, and brought him to sit sulkily in his chair. It may have been the sudden lynx-like bristle of gray whisker around the wrinkled face; or the lightning change in the expression of the eyes; or the voice's almost terrifying swing upward to the dominant.

"I saw you were figurin' on somethin' like this, Mister Larsen," said Tam-Tammas," but it ain't goin'. You'll call me 'sir,' while you're on this ship, an' you won't swear away that poor devil's ticket if he'd butted his bows into ——! Get me? It ain't done any time, except by

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chiefs that want their skippers' jobs; an' it ain't goin' to be done this trip in especial. New Bristol had me in jail for seven days for violence, three weeks ago, an' she's goin' to apologize to me before my daughters. That's why I've strained the livin' Buddha out of my ship, gettin' you gang aboard. Kept your cap'n from dyin' on my hands, an' I ain't goin' to have him broke neither."

"Ain't you?" asked the chief of the *Johannes*, going pale.

"No," said Weatherfield.

"Too bad it ain't in your hands," said the big man, rising again.

"It's in my fists," said the captain softly.

And then, in a scrambling bound, he was over the chart-house table and into the Swede with both fists. It was not the advisable course, either politically or physically, but Tam-Tammas Weatherfield had been brought up in sail, and anger is generally admitted to be a throw-back to our beginnings. It was an uppercut such as is popular with buckos in the shadow of the foresail that jammed the first's head against the mahogany bulkhead, and a stomach-punch from the China packets that would have laid him kicking on the floor had the captain's arm retained the strength that had spun the packets' wheel. As it was, the mate gasped, staggered, yet was able to swing a right that missed the ducked gray head by half an inch, and splintered a panel of the matchboard.

They closed and fell, Tam-Tammas' knee in his opponent's stomach, and they rolled about the floor, tearing at each others' throats and eyeballs until the chart-house door was ringed by a ragged crowd of crew, too thirsty and too interested to have moved for the *Flying Dutchman*, let alone the third mate. They wore blue jerseys and cloth caps for the most part: they were breaking out with condenser-rash, and, judging by their undisciplined cries, they had long cherished a hidden tenderness for their captain.

"Show'm d'punch dey taught you in Sing-Sing!" shouted one man huskily.

"Fork his lamps!" said a peak-capped ex-whaler.

Temporarily, however, Tam-Tammas Weatherfield was in no position to follow advice as to an offensive. His head was being banged on the floor of the chart-house, and he was holding himself out of unconsciousness by sheer force of hanging on to the thought of his daughters, who must see him vindicated of violent behavior. He held himself so until the *Johannes*' mate's grasp slipped from his left-hand whisker, and then, with a convulsive heave of legs and stomach-muscles, Captain Weatherfield writhed from under.

He got to his knees before the mate could recover himself, and from that position launched a vicious left-hander for the temple. That gave him time to resume his feet. Standing, he received half a dozen body-blows that would have made his defeat certain if the *Johannes* man, enraged by a left hook that split both his lips, had not snatched up a pair of dagger-like dividers from the chart-table. That deed turned the fist-fight into a rough-and-tumble. Snatching the three-foot signal-telescope from its rack, Captain Weatherfield immediately felled his enemy like an ox.

The ragged crowd around the door gave a ragged cheer.

"Suppose you get to —— forrard," gasped the victor, lowering under his eyebrows. "An' if anybody asks you, the *Johannes* was hove to when her engines busted. Get that?"

When they were gone, Tam-Tammas fixed his eyes on the engineer and bo'sun of the lost ship.

"Do you get it?" he asked breathlessly.

They hesitated.

"How should her engines—" began the engineer.

"They were runnin' to keep steerage way on her," explained the captain. "If you don't think they were, step here."

The bosun grinned suddenly.

"All right, sir," he said, "but it's on your account, sir. Miller's a dirty skunk."

"In his private capacity," said Tam-Tammas Weatherfield, mopping blood from a cut on his forehead, and staring at the bo'sun, "he may be. But in his official capacity, he's your captain, and if you show him any disrespect, I'll make you regret it. You can take that message to the rest of his crew."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Then get to —— along," said Tam-Tammas irritably, "and take it."

Now that everything else was settled, the low-pressure cylinder, the thrust-block, and a main-injection valve dating from 1896

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thought the time ripe to call attention to themselves. So that it was two days before the *Elizabeth Wakelin* made the land which was visible from her bridge. By that time, Captain Miller was sufficiently recovered to smoke, to pronounce his host's cigars disappointing, and to scrawl "Rotten!" on the flyleaf of Captain Weatherfield's favorite novel. It is charitable to suppose that there was a streak of lunacy in Miller's brain. Certainly nothing else could explain his remarking to Connelly, when a boat came to take him off at quarantine, that he'd almost sooner have been left to drown, then be under the necessity of going ashore and fixing up a brass-band reception for his rescuer at the rescuer's own request.

It was almost with tears that Tam-Tammas combated this notion before, dressed in his best shore-going clothes, he left the ship next morning, higher up the river.

"I didn't request anything of the sort," he told Connelly while the boat was being lowered. "I just asked him if he'd tell the newspaper reporters that I was the feller that they'd had in jail for punchin' a feller on the nose for laughin' at my ship. I don't want any brass band. Nor I don't want any gold-mounted sextants. I got two. It's my daughters I'm thinkin' of. They read the New Bristol papers, an' I want 'em to see their dad can do other things but dot people on the boko."

"Very natural," said the third officer.

"'Sir,'" added Tam-Tammas absently.

"Nevertheless, and in spite of which, sir," came the chief's voice from the chart-house, "they seem to have got the reception all ready. I can't see very good through this telescope now, but I guess the mayor's down there on the dock. Two guys in plug hats, anyhow, an' Cap'n Miller, an' a lot of other people."

"Boat below, sir!" came a hail over the side.

Tam-Tammas Weatherfield smiled and looked reminiscently at his former anesthetist, and at the chief of the *Johannes*, who lounged sulkily on the rail with his head bandaged.

"Well," he said wistfully, "a reception won't do no harm."

Then, with his coat skirts flying, he went down the rope-ladder.

The bunch on deck lost sight of him after he went up the dock-wall into the comparatively obscurity of the covered platform: but what happened was this:

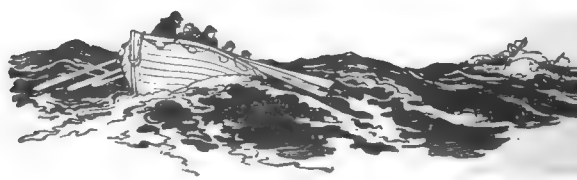
Arriving at land-level, Captain Weatherfield found himself confronted by five gentlemen in top hats—among them the magistrate who had recently sent him to prison, and the mayor who had refused the Green Funnel agents' plea that the *Elizabeth Wakelin* be allowed to sail on time. These gentlemen, who had looked so stern, were now smiling in a way that made the captain's heart expand—especially since around the great men clustered half a dozen reporters, prepared to spread the news of the great men's changed demeanor to the four corners of the State of Maine. The straining of the *Elizabeth* had not been in vain— the midnight operation had been well worth while—the fight with six-foot Larsen had been a mere bagatelle. Captain Weatherfield was no longer a swashbuckling sailor but a hero, and—what was more—a respectable man. No longer did bench and press frown upon him. Everybody was smiling!

Including Captain John Miller.

He was smiling in a peculiar manner.

He was, in fact, smiling at the steamship *Elizabeth Wakelin*, and shaking his head slowly from side to side.

With a bellow of rage, Captain Weatherfield rushed forward past the magistrate, the mayor, and the newspaper reporters and, catching Captain Miller exactly upon the point of the nose, knocked him backward off the dock wall.



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# The Nine Unknown

## Conclusion

## By TALBOT MUNDY

*Author of "Benefit of Doubt," "Treason," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form***

THE Rev. Father Cyprian aims at Hindu occultism. It was for that reason that he gave King, Grim, Ramsden and the others, access to books that no human eye should have seen.

There are other books which contain all the wisdom and secrets of the Nine Unknown, a mysterious order of India, and Father Cyprian *wanted* those books.

The Portuguese, da Gama, agreed to give up certain books he had.

But, doubting the Portuguese's good faith, the seven sons of Ali were appointed to follow him.

The others went to the Star of India, a hotel kept by Diomed Braganza. A search of da Gama's room revealed the fact that it had been recently raided.

Going up on the roof they were joined by Ali.

Ali's seven sons soon joined them and confessed that they had failed to keep in touch with da Gama. Six of them blamed the seventh for their failure.

"Beat him," said Ali.

But the noise and disturbance of the beating aroused the anger of all the roof-top dwellers and shouts of, "They are spies!—They are Government agents! *Bande Materam*" were answered by the shouts of Ali and his brood.

Then, when the fighting was at its fiercest came another cry—

"Fire!"

The smoke billowed upward and screams arose from the people jammed in the stair-head.

Escaping from this death-trap, they went to the house of Gauri, a woman who was known to be in the confidence of da Gama. She agreed to lead them to a place where he might be found.

And in an old deserted temple, underneath a pile of débris, they found da Gama—dead!

RETURNING with the bad news to Father Cyprian—leaving the sons of Ali to keep watch outside—they surprized Manoel, the butler, eavesdropping. At the same time word came that the sons had disappeared.

"Allah! My sons gone?" cried Ali, and all save Grim and Cyprian trooped after Ali to the rescue.

Now this is what had happened to the six.

Diomed, recognizing them as the men who had caused the disturbance at his hotel, ordered a constable to arrest them.

Seeing a man in a yellow garment beckoning them, the six ran off, and the constable arrested Diomed and took him to prison.

And so they all came to the police station. The yellow man and Ali's sons; the constable and his prisoner; Naryan Singh, Ali, Jeremy and Ramsden.

The yellow man had cunningly led the six there in order to proffer false charges against them. But Jeremy defeated his plan; the yellow man was arrested and put in the cell already occupied by Diomed. Three of Ali's sons were put there also.

In the mean time Grim had succeeded in getting a confession from Manoel. He had been hired by the Nine to steal Father Cyprian's books. And then entered three men dressed in yellow smocks. One carried a long silk handkerchief in his right hand. Grim stepped back instead of forward—his blood chilled. Except for Grim's activity there had hardly been a motion visible and yet—the handkerchief had changed hands. The executioner had missed.

"We want all of your books," said one of the yellow men.

"I win," Grim exclaimed suddenly, and, as he spoke, the door burst open and Ramsden led the rest into the room.

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And then a deadly gas filled the room.

"It is death," screamed Chullunder Ghose.

The three yellow men were thrust down a cellar, and the babu kicked the handkerchief from which emanated the deadly gas, down among them.

But the gas had already got in its deadly work. Narayan Singh and Father Cyprian collapsed.

Meanwhile, in the prison cell the three sons of Ali, deciding that the yellow man was the cause of their incarceration, killed him. And then came three other yellow men who killed Diomed and ordered the prison guard to release the men of the North.

This was done and one of the yellow men, first warning them that the time would come when they must pay for the service rendered bade them depart.

And so the three returned to Cyprian's.

The old man was in a bad way. So too was Narayan Singh. It occurred to King that the three yellow men in the cellar would have an antidote to the poison, and Ramsden opened the trap-door in order to question them.

He found that they had set fire to all the books which had been stored there and, in the ensuing fight, two of the yellow men were killed.

"Take Cyprian somewhere and get a good doctor for him," Grim ordered. "Ali, you and your sons guard the prisoner until we find a good place to hide him."

AND now Cyprian's allies seemed to be enmeshed in a sea of intrigue; men in orange-yellow robes seemed to be everywhere.

King, Grim, and Ramsden, aided by Chullunder Ghose, succeeded in convincing their prisoner that they were members of the Nine, and so secured information which led them to believe that there were other organizations working against the mysterious order.

Habibullah, one of Ali's sons, pretended to side with certain of the yellow-robed men and accepted the bribe they offered. He was to let them in to the hiding-place of his allies so that they could kill at leisure. Habibullah planned to double-cross the agents of the Nine but, at the critical moment, failed, and it was Narayan Singh who met them and after a bloody fight, killed them all.

Then, beset on all sides by men in yellow-robes, uncertain as to what course to pursue, the allies went to the house of Bhima Ghandava, an old friend of Father Cyprian's.

BHIMA GHANDAVA they discovered to be a man of strange affairs—a man in whom was combined all the knowledge of the Western world with the wisdom of the East.

When, after a stiff fight the man in orange-yellow had Jeff Ramsden at a disadvantage and was about to brain him with a heavy wrought-iron lamp weighing at least two hundred pounds, Ghandava's hand met the full force of the blow, arresting it in mid-air; and the man in orange-yellow seemed to be rooted to the floor—he could not move.

This proof of strong hypnotic powers was but one of the wonders Ghandava showed them.

Later, to their great amazement, he told them that he was in the service of the Nine Unknown. He also explained that the men in orange-yellow were in the service of spurious nines who sought, for their own material gain, the jealously guarded secrets of the real order.

"But go to Benares," he said, "impersonating these men in orange-yellow. There you shall see a wonder, and then guess, if you will, what Caesar—who crucified a million Spaniards simply because he had the power and inclination—would have done with poison gas."

## CHAPTER XVII

*"There will be no witnesses—Say that and stick to it!"*

UNITY is the profoundest law. Man, attempting little bush-league innovations imitates unconsciously the Infinite. So the custom is the same in Naples, or Palermo, or Chicago—Pekin—Delhi—Teheran—Jerusalem—who wages a vendetta does so on his own account, at his own risk, and he is law.

Police—all governments—are off-side—enemies in common, whom foes should unite to defeat. Whoso calls in the police is despicable in the eyes of friend and enemy alike.

And there is another rule, almost universal throughout nature. The unusual, the unexpected, the unconventional are fighting cues. The sparrow with white feathers, the man with new ideas, the fellow whose weapons are not *en règle*, alike must meet intense resentment. Fists in a land where daggers are the rule, are more heretical than ragtime in a synod. Heresy is provocation.

So there came to Ali of Sikunderam, in the office up the alley in the Chandni Chowk, a woman—veiled. Men say that was nothing exceptional in his experience. Seven sons by seven mothers are excuse for that witticism on which slander feeds, and scandal is self-multiplying—very breath in the nostrils of the scandalized. Nevertheless, it was nothing unusual for a veiled woman to be seen in that neighborhood. Scores—hundreds of them threaded the alley daily. None paid attention to this one as she climbed the crowded stairs, although that may have been partly because observant eyes—and in India all eyes are observant—might have noticed that several men in rather dingy yellow robes were watching her possessively from up and down the alley. No wise man insists on trouble in such circumstances.

She was veiled when she knocked at the office door. But the instant Ali opened she threw back the veil, as if she knew whom she would find in there and what means

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was the best for holding his attention. Certainly she seized it on the instant.

"Queen of all pearls! Pearl among queens!" he said, staring at her.

She being alone, and he well armed, there was nothing about her that he needed to fear; and there was much he found no difficulty in admiring.

She was full-lipped, heavy-breasted, and her long, black, oily hair was coiled in thick ropes that resembled snakes. She had full, bold eyes like Gauri's, whom Ali had thought of honoring with his feudal attentions until her house was burned, which made her not worth while. And she wore the same air of worldly wisdom and of tolerance for the world's too-little virtue that had made of Gauri such an easy lady to hold converse with. She was Gauri's size—height—so like Gauri that the floods of memory swept Ali's caution out from under him. But her golden ornaments were heavier than Gauri's. The emeralds in her ears were worth as much as all of Gauri's fortune before Da Gama looted her. And in one other aspect she was noticeably different.

There was a swelling under her left jaw that looked almost like the mumps, only it was more inflamed and discolored. Some one or something had struck her, not only recently but terrifically hard.

"Queen of the queens of Paradise, who hit thee?" he demanded.

He spoke tenderly—for him; but the Asian ardor blazed behind his eyes, and no woman not on adventure bent would have faced him without blenching. Ali, however, did not consider that. Men think less alertly after going long without sleep.

"Am I in paradise?" he asked. "Art thou a houri?"

She smiled at him. It may be that the smile cost agonies, on account of the swollen jaw, but she answered in a soft, low voice that thrilled with the suggestion of mystery, speaking—marvel of all marvels!—in his own tongue, the guttural, hoarse Pushtu of Sikunderam.

"Prince of princes! Captain of the thousands!"

Perfect! That is exactly the way to speak to a Northern gentleman. Ali stroked his beard and rearranged the riding-angle of his Khyber knife.

"Djereemee-Rass sahib, King sahib, Jimgrim sahib, Ramsden sahib, all send greeting. With the sons of queens, who call thee sire, your honor's honor should follow me to a certain place."

She smiled again, and Ali stroked his beard until it shone under his hand as if from brushing.

"Who struck thee?" he demanded for the second time.

"A man in the street—a *badmash**—a man in yellow—one of those who worship Kali," she answered.

Ali hesitated. Natural suspicion stirred a naturally shrewd wit, and memory, on the verge of sleep, awoke with one of those starts that bring the recent panorama of events in a flash before the mind. That set him thinking. She had asked him to bring his sons; therefore they had not been waylaid yet. She had a tiny spot of crimson on her forehead, where the caste-mark of the Kali sect had been recently rubbed out. She, if one of the enemy, might know the names of all the white men in the party, because of the five-pound note in Da Gama's hat-band, signed by Jeremy, and the sheet of paper in Da Gama's pocket on which the Portuguese had jotted down terms—and undoubtedly names. Ali added those circumstances up and multiplied the total into certainty: She sought to decoy him in order to force from him news of his friends' plans and present whereabouts.

"Queen of cockatrices!" he spat out suddenly, and slapped her with his flat hand over the jaw where the swelling was.

He slapped as he augured, shrewdly. Pain was so sudden and intense that for a minute she could not scream, but lay on the office floor holding both hands to her face and rocking herself. He stooped over her, according to his own account to feel for weapons, but made a commencement by twitching at an emerald ear-stud, and the speed with which she drew a dagger then was swifter than a snake's. He sprang clear, avoiding her upward stab by the width of the goose-flesh on his belly.

"Mother of corruption!"

She had had her chance and lost it. Whipping out his long knife he knocked her dagger spinning, and with his teeth showing clean as a hound's in a battle-laugh between the gray-shot black of beard and upper-lip he set one foot on her and pressed her to the floor.

"Mother of evil tidings! What ill-omen brought thee? Speak!"

* Low-down scoundrel.

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BUT she would not speak, although he showed his swordsmanship, whirling his blade until it whistled within an inch of her defiant eyes. And from that he drew his own conclusions.

"So! Not alone? An escort waits—too far away to hear screams—but will come unless the she-decoy returns in time. Hah!"

He removed his foot from between her breasts and she raised herself with a hand on the floor, but he kicked her under the injured jaw again and with the same toe sent her floundering behind the desk, where the prisoner in yellow lay.

Suddenly then it occurred to him that she and the prisoner should not hold intercourse. It only takes a second for the East to tell the East the news. He pounced on her again and dragging her away, flung her across the room, bending then over the man in yellow to make sure his bonds were taut and cursing him for having dared to see what he could not help seeing.

"Allah! If I were a hard man I would tear thy tongue out to save talk! Luckily for thee my heart is wax. I am a man of mercy."

He repaid attention to the woman then, and it was time; she was creeping along the wall toward the door. He seized her by one foot and, she kicking like a caught fish, pulled her back to the farthest corner, where he tied her hand and foot with thin string meant for wrapping parcels, using the best part of a ball of the stuff, for Ali was no sailor.

The rest of his task was simple enough—and satisfying. He removed the emeralds from her ears, the gold from her neck, wrists and ankles, and every one of the jewelled brooches that fastened her outer garments.

She called him a pig of an Afghan for that, and he was in the act of gagging her by way of reprisal when another knock sounded on the office door.

He knew it was none of his sons. They had their own private code of signals. He picked up the only rug and heaped it over the woman to conceal her.

"Mother of a murrain!" he growled in Pushtu. "Does death tempt you? If so, make one sound, and die thus!"

In pantomime he showed how a Khyber knife goes in below the stomach and rips upward. Then he arranged the rug over her and turned to face the door.

"Open!" commanded some one—a stranger with a strange voice, speaking Hindu.

There was only one voice. He could only hear one man shifting his feet restlessly. He could not see through the frosted glass panel of the door, nor through the key-hole for the key was in it.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"A messenger. The *sahib's* sons have sent me."

That was an obvious lie. The sons of Ali of Sikunderam knew better than to instruct their furious sire by deputy.

"How many of you?" he demanded.

"One."

But he suspected, and suspicion was unthinkable without its concrete consequence, with Ali's nerves in that state. He struck the glass panel with his knife-point and as the glass broke clapped his eye to it.

He could only see one man—a fellow in a yellow smock, apparently unarmed. He, too, used the broken pane to get a glimpse of Ali. He used it to good purpose. Drawing back suddenly he thrust a long stick through with such force that it drove Ali back on his heels and sent him reeling against the desk. And before he could recover a lean hand beneath a yellow sleeve inserted itself through the broken pane and turned the key. One man walked in, followed by five others, the last of whom closed the door behind him and stood with his back against the broken glass.

"Be swift!" said the first man. "Two belonging to us are here. A woman and a man. Where?"

But six to one, though odds enough, were no conclusive argument to Ali of Sikunderam. And there are few, who have not seen it, who are able to imagine the swiftness and the spring-steel savagery of the North at bay. All six drew knives from under their smocks, but all too late—Ali had laid out two of them, gutted and writhing in their own hot bowels, before he had as much as to guard himself. And as the third man advanced with a jump to engage, the sixth screamed; some one in the passage thrust a long knife through the broken glass and pierced him through the kidneys from behind.

The reserves had come! Now three men had to deal with Ali and with six of Ali's sons!

But they were three stern fighters, and they, too, had reenforcement.

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She on the floor, whom Ali had struck and kicked and covered up, struggled—only ifrits or a sailor could explain how from the tight-wound string, and seized a knife whose hilt was slippery with the blood of its erstwhile owner. With that she slashed the lashing on her ankles, and a yell from one of Ali's sons warned him in the nick of time that she was up on her feet and coming.

Rahman's pantomime saved him. Rahman, speechless with excitement, ducked as he, too, would have ducked if the knife had been swinging at the base of his own skull. And Ali imitated, hardly knowing what he did, guided more by telephatic instinct than by his reason. For the second time the woman's knife missed him by a hair's breadth. The back of his neck felt seared as if a hot iron had almost touched it, so close and so terrific was the woman's lunge.

But it was *her* last act, not his. The North's retort discourteous is quicker than the wild boar's jink and rip. The impulse brought her stumbling against his back and he threw her with the "chuck" they boast in Cornwall—over his shoulders, forward—caught her as she fell—thrust her like a shield with his left hand into an opponent, driving the long knife with his right into her body three times—and then slew the man behind her with a downward blow that split his skull midway to the mouth. The knife stuck in the tough bone. The men in yellow rushed him, taken in the rear themselves by Rahman and the other sons. Ali let go the Khyber knife and drew his dagger; and from that moment there was no more hope or thought of quarter—no hope for whichever side was weaker, unless interruption came. And the odds were five to two, for two of Ali's sons were down.

And who should trespass into other men's disputes in Delhi, in these days of non-cooperation and distrust? A man might yell for help the day long, and no more than tire his lungs. There is trouble without wooing it, and he who starts a fight may finish it counting on no interference from strangers.

NOW the office was a shambles—blood and bowels on the floor—loose-limbed dead men yielding this and that way to the kicks of the frenzied living—grunts—low, explosive oaths—the sudden, sullen, lightning thrust and parry as the daggers struck or missed—no shouting now—no breath for it—the stink of raw blood and the electric thrill of death's wings—thumping of feet growing fewer. No beasts fight as evilly as men.

Three of Ali's sons, including Rahman bled to death on the office floor while their sire raged like a typhoon over them, working with a dagger for room and time in which to free the long knife from his victim's skull. And then with a foot on the skull and a wrench he had it. So, not neatly, as Narayan Singh would have slain, but roughly like the butchers who cleave meat in a hurry as it hangs, he hacked the two remaining Kali-men to death, saving three sons—one so badly wounded that his only chance was in the hospital.

"And so what?" he demanded, questioning Allah it might be as he wiped his reeking blade on a victim's smock.

The two whole sons asked nothing, but proceeded to the looting, one stripping his dead brothers first of every valuable thing and the other naturally picking out the woman. Ali laughed at him.

"Fool! Am I brainless? Should I tie her and not scratch?"

He had no more breath for words. Disgust at losing three, it might be four sons in such a mean fight half-unmanned him. With a gesture he ordered the woman thrown under the rug again where he himself had hidden her, and the son obeyed. He did not really know why he ordered that. He was hardly thinking. Rather he was looking about him for a bandage for his son's wounds. Suddenly he thought that if he left the wounded son there, as he must, the presence of the woman's body might make lying difficult; and Ahmed would have to lie like history or else say nothing when relief should come. Lying is much the easier of those alternatives, to a man born north of where the Jumna bends by Dera Ghazi Khan.

"Take her out! Cover her in that!" he ordered; and the prisoner behind the desk, hearing but not seeing, made a mental note of it.

He heard, too, the grunting and heavy foot-steps as the two uninjured sons picked up the rug with the woman's body and carried it out to be dumped in the unused cellar where rats would eat it, and whoever found bones might conjecture what he pleased.

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Then Ali, bandaging his wounded son as carefully as circumstance permitted, gave him water and forbidden whisky from the office gallon jar, and bade him sit there with his back propped in a corner until some one should come from the Moslem hospital—to whom he should lie like a gentleman.

"These men in yellow came—broke in—found me and my brothers—attacked us murderously—and were slain by me, Ahmed son of Ali of Sikunderam. I know not why they came, nor who they are."

That was the lie, and surely good enough for a man at death's door, in a land where a trial may take a year awaiting.

"There will be no witnesses. Say that and stick to it!" said Ali. "Beg of the *Wakf* for proper burial for thy brothers and, it may be, also for thyself!"

Then he gagged and blindfolded his prisoner, released his legs and hurried him out between the two uninjured sons through the door at the end of the passage into the warehouse, where all was gloom among the bales and none asked questions in any event. Thence he sent one son running to find a man, whose word was good with the Moslem hospital, and sat down on a bale of aloes to consider.

The problem was how now to get in touch with King, Grim, Jeremy and Ramsden. He was not afraid of being caught, because only his friends had keys to the warehouse door, nor afraid of consequences if he should be caught, since in a land of lies, who lies the best is king. Dead men are not efficient witnesses, and Ahmed had been well trained. But the prisoner was an embarrassment, and he did not care to dispose of him without instructions.

He removed the stuffy blindfold from the prisoner, not from merciful but mercenary reasons. The drugs in the bales all about them were pungent and exceeding dry. He had a thought, that became him as soldier of fortune.

"Are you thirsty?" it occurred to him to ask.

Unwilling to admit it, for he guessed the motive, the prisoner shook his head. Ali gravely doubted him. He sought a bale of capsicum, and pulling loose a handful crushed the stuff to powder under the prisoner's nose. If he had not been thirsty previous to that, his condition now was indisputable.

"You shall drink when you tell me where my friends are!" he said bluntly.

"I don't know that," the prisoner answered.

"By Allah, but you do! You saw the fellow with the green-lined cloak, who took my friends the *sahibs* and the Sikh away with him. You recognized him, for I saw your eyes. Tell me where he lives."

The prisoner coughed up most of the torturing dust.

"I will tell you when you tell me what you did with HER," he answered, the water running from his eyes. "Where have you hidden her?"

"I killed her," Ali answered, so promptly and frankly that the prisoner was sure he lied.

"Let me speak with HER, and I will tell you anything you want to know," he answered.

"Answer my question. Moreover write an order for a thousand rupees payable to my son, who will collect the money and bring water back with him. Then you shall drink," said Ali; and having thrown more dust of capsicum into the prisoner's lips and nostrils, he settled down to bide his time and meditate.

Sleep was overtaking him again. He had to wrestle with his senses. Thoughts shaded into one another, and the outlines blurred until a half-dream and a fact were indistinguishable. He could not guess what capital to make of the prisoner's belief that SHE—whoever *she* was—was still living. He had slain her, that was sure.

The prisoner wished to speak with her, that was also sure. Ergo, she meant something to the prisoner; but what? And what might it all mean to his friends the *sahibs?* Ali was forever thoughtful for his friends, when his own immediate and perhaps prospective needs had had attention. How he wished he had brains like Jimgrim sahib, or King sahib's experienced wisdom, or Jeremy sahib's swift intuition, or even the ability to grind an answer out as Rammy sahib did, seeming to compel his intellect to work by brute force! He tried that, but solutions would not come.

He heard his son return and listened dully to the account of how the ambulance was coming presently. He heard the ambulance arrive, as in a dream, and heard the tramping and excited comments of the men, who

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found all those corpses and one unconscious Hillman in the office, and were suitably impressed. He heard the tramping and the voices die away, and later, as the heat increased, sent one of his two sons for water, which he drank in the prisoner's presence. Then, giving orders to his sons to increase the prisoner's thirst by all means possible, he fell asleep and dreamed, according to his own account of it, of emeralds and wild-eyed women and of a great high-priest who came and blessed him, making signs in the air as he did so with an unsheathed Khyber knife.

He awoke with a start, and stared into a strange face!

"Is this he?" a quiet voice asked, and then he heard a voice he would have known in any crowd as Jimgrim's:

"Sure. Say, Ali? What did you keep the prisoner dry for? And what does the locked-up office and broken glass mean? Bhima Ghandava sahib and I have had to come the back way because of a police guard on the stairs and in the passage. Why?"

Ali explained and, drawing the two aside, told partly why he gave the prisoner no drink.

"He believes SHE still lives," he added, wondering what Grim would make of it.

Grim glanced at Ghandava.

"Loose him and let him go!" advised Ghandava, almost instantly.

"By Gad, sir—by the Big Jim Hill—I do believe you're right!" Grim answered.

"Ye are mad!—both mad!" said Ali, staring stupidly.

"Good enough. Let the prisoner go!" commanded Grim.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*"He has whatever she had!"*

IT WAS Grim, returning from the Chandni Chowk that afternoon, awaking them one by one, who summoned another conference in Ghandava's great, cool library. Ghandava had disappeared, but the smell of artful cookery ascended from below-stairs, and the green-lined *chela* kept himself in evidence at intervals, incurious and yet alert. He never seemed to listen, nor to keep from listening, but hovered in and out like a house-mouse busy with affairs behind the scenes. Once he was gone for a whole hour.

"Giving my imagination utmost creeps!" as Chullunder Ghose remarked.

"Ghandava fears only this," said Grim: "The prisoner may be too incensed by Ali's ill-treatment. He was a wabbler to start with. You remember, when we caught him in the minaret he was flinching from doing murder in Benares. He'll return to his superiors, because there's nowhere else for him and he may flop back altogether. He'll say the snake-woman is alive and that we've hidden her. His murderous instincts may have been so stirred up by Ali that he'll volunteer to identify and kill us all as opportunity permits."

"Why should Ghandava worry about our getting killed?" asked Jeremy, unimpressed.

"He's in with us," said Grim.

"Where is he?"

"Gone. Benares!"

Jeremy whistled. Again he saw adventure coming to him on the wing down-wind, and liked it.

"You see," said Grim, "they won't rest while they think we've got that woman. They'll not look for her corpse while they think she's alive, and they'll probably try to kill us one by one until we give her up."

"Tell 'em she's dead then, and where to find the body," Jeff suggested. "Where's Ali and where did he hide it?"

"No!" Grim answered instantly. "Let's get a woman to represent her! Keep them tracking us—you get me? Let them think their woman has swapped horses—joined us. One man we've let go will give them ground for that idea. The other—the big one—will tell 'em we're cahooting with the Nine Unknown——"

"How'll he know that?" Jeff objected.

Grim signified the green-lined *chela*, who had come in through one door, apparently to set a book in place, and walked out through the other at the rear.

"He showed him the way out. He told him that," said Grim.

"Oh glorious! Oh exquisite! What ignorant West would call 'Telepathy'!" Chullunder Ghose exclaimed. "Mahatma, knowing what outcome of conference will be, *wills* that *chela* shall say thisly and do thusly! Krishna! This is——"

"Billiards!" said King, and prodded him in the stomach with the window-pole.

"I foresee fortune!" Narayan Singh

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announced. But what *he* means by fortune is the opportunity to use his faculties, including swordsmanship

"Thou second-sighted butcher!" said the babu.

"*Chup!*"* commanded King.

"You see, it's this way," Grim resumed. "Ghandava knows how we hit this trail, considers we're honest, and says we're useful to his employers. We're helping to put the hat on these criminal Nines, whose hour, by his account of it, has come. He plans to reciprocate. He'll let us see what we started after."

"The gold?" demanded Ramsden.

"So I understand him."

"Books! Tut-tut! The books!" said Cyprian, emerging with a big book in his hands from behind the detached case.

But Grim shook his head. Ghandava had said nothing about showing where the secret books were kept. Cyprian shrugged his shoulders, losing interest, and if he cared that men had died he did not show it. Probably he wanted not to seem to know too much.

"Where's Ali?" Ramsden asked again.

"Gone with two sons in search of Gauri. She looks enough like the woman of the snakes to pass for her in a pinch with the lights turned low. At any rate, she's our lone chance," Grim answered.

"Pooh!" said King. "She'll funk it."

"Broke. House burned. Past the bloom of youth. Funk nothing!" Grim retorted. "She'll jump at the hope of a *lakh* of rupees."

"Who'll pay her the *lakh?*" wondered Jeremy.

"That was the bargain we made—a *lakh* in return for her help if we find the money."

"And if we can't collect?"

"Grim, Ramsden and Ross must pay her a solatium."

"And if Ali can't find her?"

"Then the plan's down the wind."

But it was not, although Ali came within the hour and swore that neither he nor either of his sons could find the woman.

"She is doubtless already in the household of a priest," he swore resentfully. "I could have scared the fool! By Allah! She would have obeyed if I had found her!"

"Oh my ——! *Hinc illae lacrimae!*" remarked the babu, voicing the collective gloom. "We get a mental glimpse of gold and lo, it vanishes physically with the veil of an immodest woman!"

But they were reckoning without the green-lined *chela*. Fastidious, ascetic, handsome, one would have selected him no more than a church verger to know Gauri's whereabouts. Yet he came in smiling—said they should be getting ready—and offered to find Gauri soon enough.

"For I have means within means," he explained, without explaining.

"Get me a carriage. Send me home!" commanded Cyprian.

But that was vetoed instantly. The battle in the office was as sure to cause investigation as a fire does heat. Cyprian might have been seen pressing in and out on several occasions, and if inquiry should lead to his house there were the furnace and the ashes of burned books to excite suspicion further.

"Stay here, pop, until we come back from Benares, or our bargain's off!" said Jeremy.

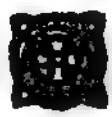
"You mean—you mean?"

"If you leave this house before we return, and we find books, we'll keep 'em!"

"Take the padre-*sahib* with us!" urged Narayan Singh. "He is old and little. Somewhere we can hide him."

Behind the old priest's back the green-lined *chela* shook his head, disparagingly. But there was no need. Cyprian, loaded down with more than weight for age, would have refused that anyhow. Nor did his empty nest, with its secret squirrel-horde of books gone, attract him any more than the prospect of answering awkward questions. There would be no servant there—no tidiness—none of the associations that had made the place worth while.

"I will stay here," he said simply, and returned, black book in hand, behind the book-case.



THEN came the game of getting ready. Little, little details are the nemesis of dams, designs and men. They had to think of all the details of manner and habit, and they ended up by lamp-light, weary, with the green-lined *chela* looking on. Then, after supper in the room below, it was all to do over, for Gauri came with her maid and drilled them, while Ali snored and dreamed of vengeance on every man in India who had worn, did wear, or

*Shut up!

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ever should wear a yellow smock; and it happened thus that their edifice of make-believe was crowned—pluperfect.

For Gauri was a pauper. Shabby clothes were all she had, so she and the maid, whose lack of fortune was involved in hers, were as sharp-eyed and hungry for a chance as adjutants* at dawn.

"How did you come here?" Ramsden wondered, when they paused between rehearsals.

Gauri glanced at the snoring Ali, shuddered at his long knife, and explained:

"They said he—that one—looked for me. I was afraid. His knife is his god. Better trust one who worships his belly. Better trust Chullunder Ghose! I ran and hid. But another in a green-lined cloak came, saying Ali wanted me in behalf of a *sahib* in the Street of Shah Jihan. One who overheard him told me, and I went to see. There a man with a caste-mark such as I never saw met me and brought me hither. That is how I came. Now—ye say Ali slew that woman whom ye wish me to resemble? Slew her without witnesses?"

They nodded, waiting. Something was in the wind, for her eyes shone.

"Pay me for my services whatever jewelry she had!"

"But—" Jeff Ramsden's thoughts were a bar behind the rest as usual.

She interrupted him.

"*He* has whatever *she* had," she said simply.

She had cast her die, and she was a gambler heart and soul. Nothing—no argument could change her once the stakes were down; and she had named the stakes—her neck against whatever Ali's loot amounted to!

So Ali had to wake up, she protesting that the best way would have been to loot him while he slept. Grim did the explaining, taking all for granted, to save time.

"Ali, there is an argument. You settle it. One says, whoever finds this gold should have the whole of it; the others, that all should share and share in any case. What say you?"

And if the North loves one thing it is playing Solomon, pronouncing wise decisions, justice in the abstract being one thing and according it another.

"We being friends," said he, "what injures one is injury to all; and by Allah, what profits one should profit all of us. So we should share and share alike."

Grim looked disappointed—subtlest flattery!

"Then if I alone should of my own skill win a treasure, should you share that?" he demanded.

"By the Prophet of Allah, why not?" Ali answered, delighted to have Jimgrim on the hip. "Whatever any of us finds while our agreement lasts belongs to all, to be shared between us."

Grim might have jumped him then, but Grim was wise.

"Then could the vote of all of us dispose of the discovery of one?"

"Why certainly, by Allah, yes!" said Ali. "Was that not agreed in the beginning?"

"Then let us vote on this," said Grim: "Gauri offers her service for the jewels you took from the woman you slew in the office! Some one should propose a motion! Let us see the jewels anyhow."

Trapped—aware that he was trapped, and on the horns of his own verdict—Ali looked about him; for the East may not be made to hurry even in dilemma, having earned that right by studying dignity for thirty thousand years. He had two sons. Conceivably he might tempt Chullunder Ghose, or threaten him, and cast four votes. Omitting Cyprian, who might, or might not vote, that left the odds five to four against him, for he knew Narayan Singh would side with his Western friends, and there was no doubt in his mind whatever what they would do.

He might refuse to show the loot. He might walk out, explaining he would think the matter over, and naturally not return. He who had lost so many sons had a right to consider himself—to recompense himself as best he could. Yet he was not quite sure of the value of his loot. The gold was heavy enough, but the ear-studs might be glass. In the long, long pause that followed Grim's question he even considered the thought of betrayal—for he was born north of Peshawar, where treason and a joke are one. But he knew that if he went to the police, then he would have to do his own explaining of perplexing matters that were best let lie. Moreover, the police might—nay, *would* search him.

And the men he faced were men. In his own storm-tempered, hillman way he loved them.

*An enormous dog protected in India as a scavenger.

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"It was knowing that myself must first comply with the decision, that I answered as I did," he said with dignity, hitching to the front beneath his shirt the leather-pouch in which he carried his own secrets. "Lo, I set example. Look! By Allah, let none say Ali of Sikunderam fell short of an agreement!"

Handful after handful he pulled out the necklace—little golden human skulls on a string of golden human hair—the bracelets—the anklets—the brooches—and the earrings last. He tossed the earrings into the midst of the heap, half-hoping none would notice them; but by the light he saw in Gauri's eyes he knew that whether they were glass or not they, too, were gone for just so much of the forever as a woman could withstand his seige.

"Lo, I have given five sons and now this!" he said with dignity. "As Allah is my witness, I give, knowing there is recompense."

"Some one should make a motion," Grim repeated.

"What I give is given," said Ali, gesturing magnificently. "I will not vote."

Ramsden picked the necklace up and weighed it in his hand.

"This ought to be enough alone," he said. "It's worth about—at least——"

"No! No! All or nothing!" Gauri screamed, and her eyes looked nearly as infernal as the woman's in the temple had done. "See! Look! The earstuds—Kali's emeralds!—none like them!" Then her voice dropped. "I must wear those—all those," she added, confidently, knowing her case was won. "The priestess' insignia! Mine! Keep your *lakh* of rupees! I choose these!"

They agreed, for they had to. Even Ali agreed to it. But his Wintry eyes met hers, and she breathed uneasily as she put her head through the ugly golden necklace and the maid set the studs through the holes in the lobes of her ears.

"Each emerald a fortune!" the maid whispered. But Ali heard it.

"Aye, a fortune!" he said nodding. "Who should grudge a dowry to the queen of cows?" Which was a Hindu compliment, intentional, so understood and shuddered at. She knew the North, or rather the freebooting blades who came thence.

"Wear them! Wear them! They become thee!" Ali urged her.

SO, WITH the jewels on and her hair arranged in heavy coils, the lady of delights—as Ali called her—looked not so unlike the priestess. All she lacked was, as Chullunder Ghose assessed it, "just a year or two of education."

The worst was that she thought a course of visiting from shrine to shrine and making little offerings to gods and goddesses in turn, along with favors to the priests, entitled her to know it all. Of men she was a shrewd enough judge. She could weigh the chance of wrath and pick a living in the trough of evil. But of women—save such women as herself—she knew scarce anything, and that distorted.

"Self, knowing women too well, can attempt conversion," said Chullunder Ghose and set to work to try to teach her how a priestess, used to the public eye and awe, would sit, and stand, and move about, and be.

Time and again she flung herself to the floor in tantrums, cursing the fat babu in the names of the whole Hindu Pantheon. Repeatedly he coaxed her back to patience, helped by the maid, who kept reciting what the emeralds were worth—pure music!—music that had charms to soothe the Gauri's breast.

"Even so they tell me chorus girls are taught to act as duchesses!" said the babu. "Failing all else shall escape to London and start academy of female manners! Watch me, Gauri—beautiful Gauri—goddess among women, watch me—walk like this!"

And in spite of stomach big enough for two men, hams that would have graced a Yorkshire hog, and a costume not intended for solemnities—his turban was pink—he walked across the room with perfect grace—Falstaff playing Ophelia, surpassing good.

She imitated him. He sighed.

"Thus, *sahiba*." None had ever called her that. The title is for wives of honest husbands, and she softened, even to the brink of tears. "You are a queen—a goddess. All know it. That is not enough, though. You, you the goddess, know it! You are not afraid of what they think. You do not *want* them thus to think. They *do* so think. You *know* they think. You are a goddess! Now, Bride of the Mountains, walk across the room again."

"Aye, Bride of the Mountains!" murmured Ali.

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Chullunder Ghose had meant a pious compliment, for one of the names of the Daughter of Himavat, the Bride of Siva, Him who sits upon the peaks, is Gauri. But Ali misinterpreted, and Gauri understood. She burst into tears again, beat on the floor with her fists, had hysterics, and obliged the poor babu to start again at the beginning.

Then the road! Old India by night in yellow smocks beneath an amber moon, with an ox-cart following, in which the women lay—a two-wheeled, painted cart with curtains, driven by the green-lined *chela* and drawn by the same two splendid Guzerati beasts well fed and rested in Ghandava's stable! The ancient gate—the guard, too sleepy to make trouble, too respectful to draw curtains, and aware of the weight of silver in shut palms—then the wide way flowing on forever between shadows so silent and drunk with color that the creaking of a wheel alone recalled a solid world.

And Jeremy—drunker than the shadows were! Full—flooded—flowing over with delight; the memory of wild Arabia awake within him and a whole unknown horizon beckoning in moonlight to adventure such as Sindbad knew! He danced. He sang wild Arab songs—as suitable as any, since an unknown tongue was all conditions called for. He flicked a long silk handkerchief with imitative skill. And the few, afraid night-farers drew aside to let the short procession pass.

Jeff Ramsden, striding like a Viking with a rod across his shoulder, meant ostensibly for vicious dogs, a calf like Samson's showing under the yellow smock, and an air of ownership. He owned the earth he trod on. Good to see.

Then King and Grim together, yellow-smocked and striding just as silently, more modern, more in keeping with the picture and matched, as it were, in the setting by Chullunder Ghose, who walked after them without enthusiasm, not needing to pretend, except to creed; pink turban gone, he, too, was in orange-yellow.

Then Narayan Singh, in yellow like the rest, a little too ostensibly unarmed. The hilt of something swinging as he strode was exaggerated by the smock that covered it, and his shadow resembled a monster's.

Then the cart. Then Ali and his two sons, not pleased with playing Hindu, looking like dark spirits of the night whom men would well avoid. Wayfarers beg rides in India even as in the West, but none did that night. None stole a ride. And the multitude, who make it their profession to extort alms by the ancient processes—who watch the highways and by day or dark flock forth like bugs to pester—not recognizing innocence, desisted.

All one night they trudged the highway with the geometrical designs of irrigation ditches glinting in the moonlight all about them; and at dawn they were offered bed and board by a Brahman, who called the green-lined *chela* "holy one." At one end of the garden-compound, of which his house formed the front, was a long shelter subdivided into stalls, in which he said it was his privilege to acquire merit by entertaining pilgrims. He asked no questions—only offered food and asked a blessing in return—so there they slept on string-cots, three to a stall, the women-folk remaining in the closed cart, angrily complaining of the heat.

Then night again and another march, the women, too, on foot; for they left the ox-cart with the Brahman—six or eight miles' walk in mellow moonlight to a way-side station, where a Hindu station-master said they honored his poor roof, and where, by dint of lies along the wire, he finally secured a whole reserved compartment for them on a through train for Benares.

## CHAPTER XIX

*"Once, when they who keep the secrets——"*

BENARES! Mother Gunga, who if she would, could tell of the birth of half-a-world, lapping the steps below the *ghats*. Crimson fire and leaping flame where they cremate the dead. Moonlight on a hundred thousand heads and shoulders, as the "heathen" stand breast-deep reflected in the stream and pray for blessedness. Built on Benares! For the temples that have stood a thousand years are crumbling above foundations that were ancient cities before Hermes was Hierophant of Mysteries. Troy seven times rebuilt on Troy is but a new thing to Benares.

The train rolled in, panting at the end of awful night; and it was no more to Benares than a new bird added to the hordes of feathered scavengers.

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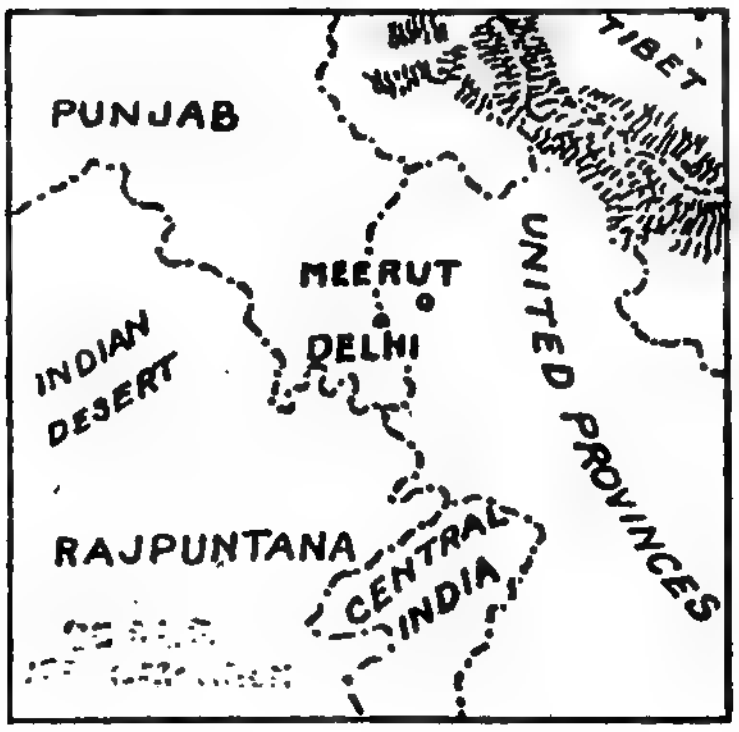
Under the hot iron roof the train disgorged its crowd, itself impersonal, they seeking abstract bliss—an iron-age implement subserving Manu and His laws. It was no more to Benares than the flies that drone around the *ghats* at dawn.

The green-lined *chela* led, threading the swarm that checked and gathered itself,




bleating for its females and its young like sheep, demanding neither food nor sleep but the view of Mother Gunga and the privilege of plunging in at sunrise.

Gauri and her maid walked beside Chullunder Ghose, both veiled.

"One sees us!" said the babu. "Let the veil fall open."

On the journey they had labored over it, cutting and stitching until if loosed it fell so perfectly that her face could be seen in profile—which was best—and be covered again instantly. Gauri saw a man in yellow staring at her, and snatched the veil together.

"He is big, and I am afraid of him!"

"Good!" said the babu.

"But he saw I am afraid!"

"Better! He knows you are not a goddess! You *should* be afraid of him! Now, not knowing, he will go and say he knows, same being excellent in politics but no good when up against Jimgrim and the green-lined *chela*—latter being devil very likely, though I think not. Woman, behave fearfully! He turns again and looks."

So Gauri hid behind Chullunder Ghose's bulk, as if she were a merchant's wife out for the first time far from home. And the very tall man who had turned and looked, beckoned another, shorter, nearly naked one, who came and followed the party, presently beckoning others to keep him company.

So, though they threaded a score of streets not wider than an ox-cart, turning this and that way almost incomprehensibly like ants, and entered at last a high door in a wall, which slammed behind them and was bolted and barred by some one in a cabin like a sentry-box, who performed his task unseen, they knew they were not lost to knowledge. They could hear the footsteps of the spies, who ran to tell their whereabouts to whom it might concern.

And here—in a quiet clean oasis—the green-lined *chela* seemed no longer in authority. He accepted orders from a man in white, whose bald, bare head was fleshless—skin on bone, as if it had died but still was needed by the body. Only his eyes lived, burning, down deep in the sockets. It seemed he was host.

"Introduce us. What's his name?" Grim asked.

"No name," the *chela* answered.

Only then they all remembered that the green-lined *chela*, too, had given no name, then or at any time.

"What's yours?" Grim asked him, but he laughed and shook his head.

So, failing introduction, Grim lined up the party, named them, and began to speak about Ghandava. That name, too, apparently meant nothing here. The living skeleton in white took no account of it. He turned on his heel and led them indoors, into an ancient palace, now as plainly furnished as a monastery, and upstairs to the first floor. There, saying nothing, he made a gesture, signifying that the floor was theirs and, turning to the *chela*, who had followed, dismissed him with a monosyllable. The *chela* neither spoke nor displayed the least emotion, but turned and went.

Nevertheless there was an atmosphere of comfort, and even of friendliness. The man in white stood waiting by the door until silent servants brought water and a heap of clean sheets. Others brought food—bread, vegetables, milk—and then, but not till then, the man in white left them, not having said one word except to the *chela*

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to dismiss him, yet contriving to convey the thought that they were welcome.

"And why not welcome?" wondered Jeremy. "Benares looks to me to need jazzing."

"My ——!" Chullunder Ghose exploded.

All the long front of that floor was a veranda, cool and deep, facing the Mother of Rivers above ancient roofs. They had five separate vistas between temple domes, and down one lane of ancientry could see the granite steps, and thousands of naked men, and women veiled in lightest muslin, descending to bathe and pray; for sunrise is the holiest hour of all.

Rafts on the river's bosom swarmed with Brahmins sitting rigid in the act of meditation. Between the rafts the stream flowed spread with flowers, because none of the thousands had come empty-handed, but with garlands, loose blossoms and plaited strings of buds by way of offering.

The cooing of doves was all about them, and the music of temple-bells. The breath of Mother Gunga, who gives life and takes it, pervaded all—miasmic say the scientists, ignoring truth of a millennium. (They *drink* the water where the ashes of the dead are strewn, and take no hurt.) Birds everywhere, especially crows lining the ridges of temple roofs with jet black; and down the granite steps to the river's brink, between the men's bare legs and over the gaudy garments laid aside, monkeys scampering to drink, unfearful and unnoticed.

"Good!" said Jeremy, sniffing and filling his lungs.

Along a street below them caste-less bearers were carrying the dead on litters, to be bathed a last time at the river brink before being laid out on their funeral pyres. None noticed. In Benares it is life that counts, not death, and life is of the spirit not the senses. When a pilgrim shuffles off his mortal coil they make away with it and burn it swiftly, lest it hamper his efforts to climb higher.

DOWN another vista lay the ruins of a temple like an island in the stream; for centuries ago, when Gunga rose in spate, she underswept the walls and rooted in among them till the whole enormous building tumbled into the flood. Now a naked *fakir* stood on the highest stone of its ruins—young, with long hair on his shoulders—poised against the blue sky——

"Fancy free!" suggested Jeremy. "That lad looks happy. Nothing to wear, nor do but stand still! How many meals a day, I wonder?"

"One," said a voice; and there Ghandava stood, among them, unannounced!

"I have creeps!" remarked Chullunder Ghose.

He glanced at the door. It was locked on the inside, but Ghandava might have done that—only the lock squeaked badly, and nobody had heard it.

"There are three of them. The three are one," Ghandava went on, taking no notice of the babu's nervousness. "They stand on that stone all day and all night, taking turns, relieving one another."

"Why?" demanded Jeremy.

"It always was so," he answered. "But their vigil is nearly ended."

Ghandava was bright-eyed; not from opium, that is a feverish glow, but with the light of the ecstasy men earn, who by denying self attain self-knowledge. Harder work than laying bricks!

"Why?" demanded Jeremy a second time.

"Seek, and to every question you shall know the answer, if you seek well enough, my friend," Ghandava replied. "There are others who seek answers," he added cryptically.

Whereat Chullunder Ghose recounted how a man in yellow had set spies to follow them through the streets. Ghandava smiled.

"You are protected," he said quietly. "You shall decoy them to another place."

"For that they may attack us in the other place?" Chullunder Ghose asked in consternation.

"Because their time is come."

But Ali of Sikunderam grew angry at answers in the shape of conundrums. The Hindu garb and his losses fretted him. He paced the floor like a Hillman, which is a wholly different stride from any Hindu's, and rounded on Ghandava at the end of a turn—head and shoulders over him—his fingers on the hilt of something underneath the smock.

"By Allah, I have paid already more than all these! Five sons I have given!" he exclaimed. "Shall my life follow theirs without a reason? Name thy intentions step by step, *Mahatma-ji!*"

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He used the word Mahatma as soldiers of fortune of the middle ages used the word monk—insultingly, and Ghandava, it seemed, knew better than to smile at him. An air of patronage might have been a spark to fire the tinder of the Hillman's wrath.

"Sit down then. I will tell you," said Ghandava, choosing a stool for himself and pausing until all were seated on chairs and mats.

He let it appear that Ali's protest was what moved him, and Ali made sly grimaces at his sons to signify that they should learn a lesson in deportment from their sire.

"Lo, we listen. By Allah, we have ears," said Ali at last importantly.

"You were seen to arrive in Benares," Ghandava began, "because the prisoner you let go from my house in Delhi forewarned those who are interested. You were seen to have this woman with you, and they are saying now that their priestess has wormed her way into your confidence, as otherwise she would surely have escaped and returned to them. Now, if one of you were to meet with one of them, and were not afraid, and should confirm that theory, taking an actual message perhaps from Gauri to them, using the formula, '*She says*'——"

"I am not afraid!" Narayan Singh said, interrupting. He stood up, and all who saw him knew he told the truth. He was afraid of neither death nor devils.

Ghandava nodded.

"I spoke to you all of the Wheel," he said quietly. "The Wheel turns and unless we are alert an opportunity is snatched or taken, for us or against us. In a place, which you shall see, the Nine have preserved for centuries a truth—knowledge of a truth, that is; for truth is like skill, unless used constantly it disappears. The time will come, but is not yet, when that truth may be given to the world with safety. Those in whose hands the ancient secrets are, being human, have made mistakes. Knowledge in the hands of criminals and fools is worse than ignorance. Let me illustrate:

"You have heard of the scientist who, seeking without wisdom for the knowledge he could neither weigh nor measure, introduced into America a moth that killed the trees? So. Once, when they who keep the secrets thought the time had come, they entrusted to some chosen individuals instruction concerning the scope of man's mind. But the time was not ripe. They who learned were faithless and self-seeking, so that from that one secret that escaped there sprang the whole evil of witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, black magic, hypnotism, what is now called 'mob psychology,' the black art of propaganda, and inventions that are even worse.

"Again: Surgeons and doctors know no more anatomy than a mechanic knows of alchemy. They who keep the secrets once taught certain men the rudiments of what was common knowledge long before Æsculapius. Those, though, turned the knowledge to their own account, so that it died again of selfishness—which is all-destroying; and all that remains of the art, that it was sought to heal the world with, is the trick by which practitioners of Thuggee kill their victims with a silken handkerchief!

"Chemical dyes mean poison gas. The art of flying, which was understood in India ten thousand years ago, means bombing of defenseless cities. Alcohol means drunkenness. Morphia, which is an anodyne, means vice. Only very rarely do the men appear in whose hands knowledge may be trusted. Then, and not until then, the world goes forward.

"But those who seek knowledge for selfish ends persist. In that way they are faithful! They seek it like prospectors—at times alone, at times in hordes. And because of the Wheel and the Law, as men unearth gold so these lawless seekers after knowledge draw near at times to the discovery. They *would* discover. They *would* possess themselves of secrets and destroy the world, unless they who keep the secrets were alert.

"Through alertness it is possible to see that they destroy themselves, as the hosts of Korah, Dathan and Abiram did in your Bible days—as Babylon destroyed itself, from too much wealth—as he who discovered gunpowder destroyed himself; only swiftly, and secretly, lest the world learn too much and inquire for more.

"The lawless Nines who hide under the mask of Kali-worship, by elimination and persistence have come near to discovering the place where the secret of gold is kept. The place must be changed—nay, *is*

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changed; but lest they learn that, they shall be allowed to find the former place and to take the consequences. It is there that the Wheel turns and *you* enter in."

"How so?" demanded Ali truculently; but none took any notice of him, which seemed to set him thinking on his own account. He listened attentively, but with a changed expression, while Ghandava went on with his story.

Suddenly Chullunder Ghose threw up his hands in consternation.

"Holy one!" he exclaimed. "Emolument is more than pleasing, same is necessary on this plane on which we function! Is profit barred? Is all excluded but the risk? Myself am text-book of scientific ignorance and not proud, but—family and dependents — impoverished babu — *verb. sap.*, Most Holy One!"

Ghandava chuckled.

"You shall see, and may help yourself," he answered.

"When shall I go with my message to these people?" Narayan Singh asked, standing up again.

Ramsden rose, too, stretching himself, nearly as tall as the Sikh and half-again as heavy—a man to count on in tight places.

"I'll go with you," he said quietly, meeting the Sikh's eyes.

Narayan Singh bowed, smiling a little. It was just the smallest inclination of the head, but a whole song set to music could never have answered half as much. He said no word. They understood each other.

"When shall we go?" asked Ramsden.

"When you have seen," Ghandava answered. "You must see; and every word you subsequently say to them the woman must say first to you. It is essential that these criminals destroy themselves. All you are asked to do is to make that simple for them!"

THEY ate breakfast all together on the deep veranda, Gauri and her maid as anxious as Chullunder Ghose about the rules of caste they broke, yet none of the three willing to pose as holier than Ghandava, who ate with him and had been a "heaven-born" until he abandoned caste altogether. Gauri consoled herself with the sight of the plundered emeralds.

"I shall have enough to pay the priests," she said aloud, as if answering the voice of conscience.

She did not see Ali's flint eyes blazing, nor the sly, secretive acquiescence of his sons; nor did she know why, when the meal was done, the sons threw dice on the veranda floor. No money passed between them, but they threw three times, watching each main breathlessly, and he who lost swore acridly in the name of Allah.

Ghandava watched it all but made no comment, unless, about five minutes later as he faced the Ganges, an adaptation of two of the Apostle Paul's most wholesome axioms that he let fall had bearing on Ali's attitude:

"Since all things work together for our good, and now is the appointed time, why not? Shall we be going?"

He did not say where they were going. They followed curiously, both women keeping close to him and Ali bringing up the rear with his two sons. It was as plain as day that the North was in the mood of those old Highlanders who followed Prince Charlie once as far as Preston Pans. The rear, where they can do least demoralizing, is the right place for those gentry.

Ghandava led up-stairs—the last way any one expected—out on to a roof, and up by a winding flight of steps that circled about a tower, with a stone curtain on their right that rendered them invisible from anywhere unless so distant that their heads would be unrecognizable. And then down—through a door at the summit of the tower—round and round a circular stairway in the tower's core, with ample air to breathe, but in darkness so deep that Ghandava's reassuring voice seemed to come from another world:

"This way! This way!"

And the echoes rumbled down into infinity like the voice of an underground stream. Ghandava's spirits seemed to rise as they descended.

Both women screamed at intervals, but there was always somebody for them to cling to, and the voice of Ali behind them proving his own fearlessness—to himself at least—by lecturing his sons.

"A man is a man in the dark! A man is a man in the devil's face! A man dies fighting, and Allah receives him into Paradise! Fear is a fool's religion, sons of Ali!"

"Aye, and the world is full of fools!" Chullunder Ghose confessed. "Self being one! Are there snakes?"

"No snakes!" Ghandava answered.

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"Insects?"

"None!"

"Lost souls?"

"No. They would find no rest here!"

"We are going down—down!" The babu's voice boomed hollow. "We are surely in Gunga's womb!"

"Not yet!"

"Oh ——, where are we then? I hear the rushing of waters!".

"Only air—good air," Ghandava called back.

"I hear water boiling!"

"No, for there is none."

The babu's trepidation served to keep the women from hysterics, since he voiced another fear than theirs and the two disputed mastery instead of blending into panic and hysteria. Guided by Ghandava's voice and the feel of cool, smooth masonry now on one hand, now the other, they hurried in single file along a tunnel whose floor felt polished under-foot as if a hundred generations had passed over it.

"No bats!" Chullunder Ghose complained. "So there must be devils!"

"No, no devils," said Ghandava.

"Krishna! What then? Look! See! I am blind! I saw another world! I can not see! I am blinded! I swim in fire! Why do I not burn?"

They stopped. They had all seen one flash, and then nothing but its aching image in the retina—light to which a blowpipe flame would have been gloaming!

"Watch! Wait!" called Ghandava.

"Not again! Not again!" cried the babu, and his cry re-echoed in imprisoned space—"Again, again, again, again, again!" Then the light—three flashes.

"God!"

That was King, clapping both hands to eyes that had been overstrained on active service.

"Allah! I saw devils!" (That was Ali.)

"Holy One, where are we?" (That was the babu.)

"Under the bed of Ganges!"

"The fire? Is it Agni?*"

"Electricity!" said Ramsden, speaking from memory of fuses blown out in the wilderness.

"No." Ghandava was about to explain, but three more blinding flashes interrupted.

"What then?" asked Ramsden, positive, from memory.

*The Spirit of Fire.

"Gold!" fell the answer on breathless silence, in which they could all hear Ali and his two sons loosening their Khyber knives.

## CHAPTER XX

*"Nevertheless, I will take my sword with me!"*

A PALE-GREEN astral-looking light developed gradually, turning the heart of darkness into twilight. They discerned the shadowy outlines of a cave buttressed with titanic masonry. There were no images, no carvings on walls, nor anything to mar simplicity. The proportions expressed restful, pure and final peace

There was no smell of dampness, although Ghandava said they were under the bed of Ganges. There were no bats, no filth, no occupants. There was nothing in there—in an acre of earth's foundations—but one square altar set against a wall; and thence the light came, seemingly.

Ghandava led to the altar with no more outward reverence than the vergers use who show the crowds around cathedrals. It was of some green substance so like jade to the eye that Ramsden, advancing an incautious finger, touched it. He drew it back with an oath.

"Pardon! I should have warned you. Are you hurt?" Ghandava examined Jeff's finger. "It burns like radium."

"Oh ——!" said Jeremy, breaking an hour's silence. "I've carried gold in my belt for years. My belly hasn't got a mark on it!"

Every one laughed, even Ali, and the women who knew no English. But Ghandava continued as much at ease as if he stood before a blackboard.

"You see?" he said, and pointed to where the wall arched over the altar in the shape of a shovel, base to the ground, with the apex leaning out above the center of the green stone. Exactly in the middle of the arch emerged what might have been a pipe of some unrecognizable substance, and for a space of two or three feet around it the stone wall seemed to have the consistency of pumice, as if its life had been burned out.

"Hot gold drips from that opening, drops on the stone below, and dissipates into electrons!"

"——!" said Jeremy.

"Men could raise —— with it, couldn't they!" Ghandava answered. "There is

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more force in one drop than in a box of dynamite—more in a ton of it than in Vesuvius!"

"Who tends it?" asked Jeremy.

"Those whose turn it is," Ghandava answered. "They are beyond that wall."

"Where is the store of gold?" demanded Ali hoarsely.

"Gone! Removed!"

"There can never have been much gold, or who could have moved it in haste?" the Hillman sneered, nudging his two sons.

"Never more than enough at one time in this place than to keep the drops dripping," Ghandava answered. "It has been dripping since long before Atlantis disappeared. Calculate it! There is enough in store to continue the process for as long again. But it must continue elsewhere. We must find another way of purging Gunga."

"Riddles! Forever riddles!" Ali grumbled. "Who believes a word of all this? Allah——"

Ghandava interrupted him:

"Have you ever thought how many thousands bathe in Gunga daily? How many dead, who died of sickness, are laid on the banks for the stream to wash them? How many drink as they stand waist-deep in Gunga? And how few die?"

"They say it's the sunlight," King objected. "I've read that germs of sickness can't live in Ganges water because of the strong sun."

"And you believe it?" asked Ghandava. "If so, why does the sun not kill germs in the Amazon, or the Congo River, or the Jumna or the Irrawaddy?"

"—— if I know!" said Grim. "Go on, Ghandava. Tell."

"Billions of people have drunk Ganges water, since the pilgrimages began so long ago that there is no record of them. None ever died of drinking it. They have come with cholera, and plague, and small-pox. For lack of fuel for the pyres they have thrown their dead unburned into the stream. And beside the dead they have drunk the Ganges water, taking no harm. That is because of this."

He signified the altar-stone and paused:

"Gold is the greatest purifying agent in the universe. In the words of the Hermetic Mystery: "AS ABOVE, SO BELOW." Gold is thus also the root of every evil. Gold, resolved into electrons, is the greatest force available to men. It is also by the same law men's greatest weakness. Released it could abolish labor, lack, necessity for digging coal—or it could obliterate! There is gold enough in the world to usher in the golden age, or to wipe out civilization!"

He paused again dramatically, then added—

"Nine men know the secret!"

"——!" said Jeremy.

"Many have sought for the secret until a few of them know nearly where to look. A week—a month—a year and they would find this place. It is wisdom to let them find it now. So say those who have commissioned me."

"By Allah, I weary of words!" shouted Ali, all his patience vanishing into its elements as gold had done. His voice reverberated overhead. "Show me as much gold as I can bear away, I and my sons, or ——"

In the dim green light he met Narayan Singh's eyes—could not avoid them. The big Sikh leaned and shoved a shoulder under his chin and shoving him backward so that he could use his right only with difficulty; and his sons could not have helped their sire without first passing King and Grim, with Ramsden on King's left-hand and Grim against the wall.

"Friend Ali, peace, I pray thee!" said the Sikh.

There was no alternative. The hilt of something underneath the Sikh's long smock made that fact clear.

Ghandava looked up at the spout above the green altar, listening. He said nothing, but started to walk away, and they followed in a frightened group, the women hurrying past him and the men, especially Ali, trying to disguise fear by striding measuredly. Chullunder Ghose gave up that effort.

"Lo! I claim merit! My share of the gold is a gift to Mother Gunga!" he blustered, struggling to the last to make a joke of it, and ran. Shoving the women in front of him he disappeared into the dark and they could hear his heavy footsteps stampeding until the echoing noise was swallowed in a tunnel-gurgle sounding like a laugh.

"The gold is uncontrollable when it begins to drip," Ghandava explained. "The process can be started but not

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stopped. It has been so for a hundred centuries. Not even they who keep the secrets could exist inside the cavern when the drops fall."

As they left the cave a blinding flash burst behind them, casting their shadows forward into the tunnel like the fragments of shelled infantry. Even so, facing away from it, their eyes were hurt. Intellect itself seemed stupefied, and was restored by a breath of indrawn air that reeked of hot Benares, all decaying flowers, humanity and grease.

"It ventilates the tunnel," said Ghandava. "That air, drawn in, will be burned up in the next explosion."

"Where does the product go?" Grim asked him.

"It is used."

"Why doesn't the explosion burst the cave?"

"It would, but the quantity is measured."

That was all they could extract from him by way of information. When they asked more questions he reminded them that these were ancient secrets and himself no more than a man commissioned for a task.

"Already you have seen more than uninitiated individuals ever saw *and lived to tell about*," he assured them.

Then you are an initiate?" asked Grim. But he did not answer that.

ANOTHER flash behind them that sent tattered shadows leaping into the dark ahead showed an opening in the right-hand wall, set at such an angle and so narrow that they had passed it on their way down without being aware of its existence. Ghandava led through it now, ignoring the babu and the women, who by then were ascending the circular stair in the panic that will yield to nothing less than daylight.

"You shall see, because you must *say* you have seen," he explained, taking Ramsden and Narayan Singh each by the arm, as the passage widened and turned back nearly in the same direction they had just come. Evidently they had only made a circuit to pass through the end wall of the cave. "Say nothing that is not true, even to the enemy!" he added.

And now it felt like entering the workshop where the gloaming is woven of green and golden ether. They approached a cavern—not too close, for he restrained them—in which three men watched as if attending looms, only that these looms were invisible and the shuttles resembled fish that darted to and fro forever on the same course, each swallowing the other as they met. The pale green light resembled water—the men, great hooded seals—and the silence finished the illusion, so that the ears strained for a sound of waves on some imaginary beach.

But there was no sound—not even a foot-fall; and of gold they saw no more than one bar that a man in a hood brought down steps from a gallery hewn overhead. Even the steps resembled submarine rocks, and the whoe illusion was so perfect that they caught themselves not breathing, and wondering how long they could stay submerged.

When Grim started to speak Ghandava held a hand up and restrained him. Silence, it seemed, was part of the twilight mystery. There was no heat, it was cooler there than in the other cave; no light but the dim opalescence in which shuttles made of other light swam. Nothing to understand. It stripped incomprehension naked and left it aware of itself.

"Come!" said Ghandava. "You have seen a workshop older than Benares! You have seen enough!"

Ali had seen enough to stir cupidity, and it controlled him. He brushed by with his hand on his knife-hilt and was for plunging into the cavern with his left arm hiding his face. The illusion of green water was too real to be faced without subconscious precaution of some sort. He walked forward with the sidewise pendulum motion of one who wades into the surf—threw up both hands suddenly—turned—and came hurrying back with eyes and tongue protruding.

"No air!" he gasped.

But something else had terrified him—something he could not, and never tried to explain. Followed by his two sons he took to his heels, pursuing Chullunder Ghose and the women up toward daylight; and was first out on the summit of the tower with a view of all Benares, in spite of the others' long start, thanks to the legs and the wind of a mountaineer.

"Behold, who would worship Allah?" asked Narayan Singh; and there being no more Moslems there, none answered.

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Slowly, with Ghandava in the lead, they returned by the tunnel and the steps within the tower, none saying much because of breathlessness, nor any climbing better than Ghandava, much the eldest, who waited at least a dozen times for them to overtake him. Up near the summit of the tower he opened a door that admitted to a gallery with a pierced stone screen around it; and there in full sunlight, with eyes aching, and with the sound of Ali's voice arguing above, they squatted down facing the Ganges to learn what more Ghandava had in store for them. He sat meditating for ten minutes before he spoke. Then:

"Only Truth persists. All *things* are relative, and pass when they have seen their day. Truth *is* and all phenomena are Maya.* It is nothing, then, that what you have just seen must vanish. Benares has vanished ten times. The river below you has swallowed city on top of city, and the cavern we were in lies under the foundations of a temple whose steps the Ganges laved long before Egypt grew beside the Nile. This was the Temple of the Mysteries before the Pyramids were built. And now it perishes. But Truth remains."

"Were the men we saw below there any of the Nine Unknown?" demanded Ramsden.

"None of them," Ghandava answered, looking him full in the face. "The men you saw are *chelas*. You will never see the Nine Unknown."

He was growing restless, for Ghandava. There was still the air of contact with eternity that made him so courteous and earned respect for him without his claiming it. But there was a subtle change, nevertheless, though he waited to speak again until he had their absolute attention. Then:

"The appointed time is now. I will instruct Mr. Jeremy and those who are to work with him. Are you two ready?"

Ramsden and Narayan Singh met each other's eyes and nodded gravely.

"There is a chela *below*, who will lead you to the place where the Kali-worshippers make ready. He will leave you there. Gauri, in a minute, taking words from my mouth, will give you a message to deliver. They will believe the message, but will keep you with them unless they are more mad than there is reason to believe. There are grades of madness. Theirs is familiar, and understood. All then that will remain for you to do will be to persuade them to watch Mr. Jeremy, and to follow him to the woman. You will be cared for. Play your parts, tell only truth, say no more than you must, and remember you are rendering a service to humanity.

"Nevertheless, I will take my sword with me," announced Narayan Singh.

*Delusion.

## CHAPTER XXI

*"My house is clean again!"*

IT WAS noon when Narayan Singh and Ramsden, following a *chela* fifty years of age, chose what shadows were available in streets that baked like ovens between the stifling walls. The *chela* led them past an opening in a carved wall and gave the agreed signal, passing on as if unconscious of them. They turned and walked boldly into a ruinous temple, whose floor was deep with the dung of sacred bulls and whose only light was from little oil-dishes swung by wires from a roof invisible in gloom.

As their eyes grew used to the dark they were aware of the big bronze man in yellow who had been their prisoner, standing with his back to an inner-door with arms folded over his breast. They could see the white teeth glistening between thick lips, and the whites of his eyes with a glow behind them.

He in no way resembled a spider, yet Jeff thought of him as one. Imagination painted in the web. He looked as if he expected them and, saying nothing, beckoned, with his other hand behind him on the handle of the wooden door. When they were near enough he threw the door open and stood aside to let them pass in.

Jeff led the way with the nerves of his neck all tingling in expectation of a silken handkerchief from ambush. The only thought in his head just then was whether his neck-muscles might not be strong enough to resist the handkerchief for the necessary fraction of a second until his fists could come in play. Imagination! For in step behind him strode the Sikh, who, if nothing more, would have given the alarm in time.

They were in a round room lighted by kerosene lanterns and scant rays filtered through old sacking stretched across openings in the gloom overhead. The walls were the base of a dome, whose arch was dimly

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visible, and around the walls not less than seventy men in yellow sat facing the center, where a plain stone platform a yard high stood in the midst of pillars that rose up in the form of a pentagon into the dark—a pillar to the apex of each angle.

They wore no masks, but the faces of all alike were stamped with evil and it would have been next to impossible to memorize the varying features. Proud, confident, deliberate crime was the key-note according unity, and it might have been four-score reflections of one face for all that a man could remember otherwise. The enormous bronze man leered at Jeff, thrusting his face so close that it was all Jeff could do to refrain from punching him again; but all he did was to lead Jeff and Narayan Singh to the platform, where he left them to face whichever way they chose.

"You may sit down!" said a voice in English.

But they continued standing. To have sat or squatted would have betrayed the long sword under the Sikh's smock—their only weapon. Jeff had left his automatic behind on Ghandava's advice, since—as Ghandava phrased it—"it is easier not to kill when the means are absent. He who interferes with no man's *karma* is the wisest."

They turned around, peering through the pillars to discover from which face the voice had come. He who had spoken waited until they both faced him, then spoke again—

"Where is SHE?"

He was a little man—the smallest in the room, and his voice was as tinny and mean as his English accent was ludicrous, stressing each syllable, querulous, excited, full of a kind of schoolmaster authority.

"*She* sent us," Jeff answered, and there was silence for the space of half a minute while they all considered the reply. Then:

"That may be so," a voice said from across the room. "How else should they know this place?"

"Why did *she* send you?" asked the little man.

He appeared to be in haste for information. Jeff obliged him.

"*She* said to me and to this other man: 'Obey me, and be rewarded. Tell those whom you will find in the place I name to follow you to where a *fakir* in the robe of Kali is performing feats. Follow the *fakir* to wherever *he* goes. *He* will lead to the place of the secrets you two men have seen.'"

"You have seen? What have you seen? They say they have seen!"

He translated the information into another tongue, and there was a chorus of exclamations. Then the little man said again—

"What have you seen?"

Jeff told him:

"We saw the gold turn liquid and drop on the green anvil. We saw it turn to blinding light with a great explosion. We saw the place behind the wall, where the secret is and the men prepare it. But we only saw one bar of gold."

"Bah! Bah! Who cares for the bars of gold if we have the secret! Where *is* this place?"

"The gold-light blinded us," Jeff answered. "We were led. But the *fakir* knows the way."

"How should *he* know?"

"He can make the dead talk," Jeff answered with perfect irrelevance, and there was another pause while they considered that.

Narayan Singh nudged Jeff. A man who had risen from the wall was walking toward them. He came close and looked into their faces, all unconscious of the sword that trembled on the Sikh's thigh. They recognized their first prisoner whom Grim had let go. Without a word he returned to his place by the wall and then, standing:

"That is so," he said. "These *are* the same men. Their *fakir* makes the dead speak, having stolen that secret from the Nine or learned it from the books of Cyprian. One of them slew Kansa, our leader in Delhi, and they brought the corpse a distance in the cart with me. In the presence of all who were in the cart, Kansa spoke to me, being dead, bidding me obey these people."

He sat down. His speech, too, was received in silence:

"Why does *she* not come to *us?*" asked the man with the squeaky voice at last. And Jeff, primed an hour before by Gauri picking words from Ghandava's lips, was ready with the answer:

"She had said if we would help her, we may become as you, members of your order, sharing in all things. So we help. It was *she* who went before us into the place where gold becomes light. She said she will be there waiting, only we must come soon."

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"What sign did she give?" the big, bronze man demanded with a sneer.

And for answer to that Jeff threw into the lap of the little man with the squeaky voice a golden skull twisted from the end of a necklace that morning in spite of Gauri's protests. The little man considered it a minute. Then:

"This is true," he said at last. "*She* would not have told the secret signs. See, all of you!"

And he sent the gold skull passing around the circle from hand to hand, until it returned to his again.

It was as clear as twice two, even to Jeff's ponderous intellect, that these men were not being taken by surprize. Some one had been there already—some one at Ghandava's instigation probably—warning what they could expect. They were like men strained to the start of a race, so keyed up by expectation that caution was irksome and at most perfunctory.

However, there followed a debate, because some maintained that one of the messengers ought to be kept prisoner while individuals should be sent with the other to investigate the *fakir* and report. The majority were for obeying the summons immediately. They said *She* was a seeress and they said other things about her, that would not look well between the covers of a book, but that explained a great deal of their ritual and superstition. And at last the prisoner whom Ali had kept without water got up on his feet.

Jeff broke into a sweat, and Narayan Singh drew in breath sharply between his teeth, for on this man's temper—so Ghandava said—more depended than was good to contemplate.

But it seemed he was not so revengeful against Ali as to offset that against success: he spoke fluently in a tongue that not even Narayan Singh knew, apparently urging them to obey the summons and make haste—touching his own breast, as a man might who argued that his judgment of a situation was more trustworthy than others. They appeared to yield. Then the big bronze man who had acted janitor raised another point.

HE, TOO, used the secret language but his argument was plain enough. He demanded that Jeff and Narayan Singh be tied and put in his charge. That was agreed to. He had copper-wire in his hand in readiness to tie their wrists together, but the other man who had been prisoner forestalled him with thick twine. He refused to tie their hands behind their backs, as the other wanted to, arguing that that would attract attention passing through the streets, but lashed Jeff's right wrist to Narayan Singh's left. Then some one gave them a basket to carry between them with a cloth thrown over it, so that their wrists were hidden.

There was no more said. The man who had tied them lost apparent interest and mingled with the others. The big bronze man leered threateningly in Jeff's face and pointed toward the door, following about one stride behind with the evident intention of killing at the first suspicion of trickery, and the others filed out one by one in solemn procession led by the smallest man of all, who had spoken first.

Seventy men in single file, headed by two stalwarts carrying a basket between them, would arouse comment anywhere but in Benares. There there are fifty more astonishing processions on almost any day of the year, and all are so absorbed about the business of their own escape from *Maya* that none disturbs himself about the other man's affairs. They were not even noticed. If one thing about them were remarkable it was that they excited no remark, despite the yellow smocks and the caste-mark of their dreadful goddess; and when they filed through a gate into a temple-yard and vanished they passed from the mind of the crowd as well.

It was a yard like any of a hundred in that city of clustered shrines. Four walls, carved deep with the forgotten stories of a thousand gods, enclosed an oblong space paved with heavy blocks in front of a temple whose every inch was carved in high relief—and all so black with age and dirt that none might read what legend it embodied. It was hidden lore, as safe from public knowledge as the books whose ashes lay in Cyprian's kiln, or as the Mysteries of the Nine themselves.

But on the temple steps in front of the portico a part was being enacted that any one might interpret how he chose.

A *fakir* smeared with ashes, and as nearly naked as the law permits, with more meat on his well-ribbed frame than the ordinary run of *fakirs* boast, was doing tricks with three skulls before a spell-bound gathering

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of nondescripts. It was amusing stuff, and the effect on the audience was like champagne, laughter being ten times welcome in a place where all else is so serious as in Benares.

For a while he would keep the three skulls circling in the air in the way that any common juggler can contrive; but then, with both arms suddenly extended to their limit, he would cause the game to cease and the skulls came to a dead rest facing the audience, one on the palm of each extended hand and the third on his plain black turban.

Then each skull talked to each, or tossed amusing scraps of wisdom to the audience.

It was perfect foolery, so masterfully done that folly seemed no part of it. To an audience asking only to believe, and dreading more than anything to criticize, it was inspired—miraculous—in keeping with the place—undoubtedly contrived by unseen Powers.

The advent of the seventy in yellow, with two stalwarts bearing a basket at their head, was so plainly a religious portent that the audience, already enraptured, now gave double credence—a condition that reverted on the seventy, causing them, if not to believe in the *fakir's* occult powers, at least to credit his authority.

The *fakir* set the jawless skulls again in motion and the seventy sat down to see. Then a fat man with a naked stomach, his sanctity expressed by ashes, and a pink silk turban crowning all, came and sat in front of the *fakir*, below him on the paving stones, facing both him and the audience. And while the three skulls bobbed and circled in air the fat man spoke in Hindustanee, which was the only language likely to be understood by more than a handful of any Benares audience.

"Hear what *she* says!" he whined in a nasal sing-song. "Who is *she?* Let any ask who dares! Where is *she?* Let him tell, who can find her! What says *she?* The skulls will tell! Now listen!"

They ceased from circling in air and rested as before on the *fakir's* head and his extended hands. The *fakir's* ashen face was motionless, and no breath seemed to come and go now through his slightly-parted lips. Only his head jerked suddenly from side to side from one skull to the other, so that all eyes followed his. He appeared to be wondering as much as they did at the dead things' hollow voices.

Hollow they were—maybe to cover mispronunciation and croaking, as may be forgiven dead things. And as each one spoke, it moved, not much, but enough to suggest an unseen lower jaw—although if the *fakir's* hands moved too no one observed it. Not even his head seemed to nod, to account for the movement of the skull that rested on it. The *fakir* said never a word from first to last.

"I am the skull of Akbar!" said the left-hand skull.

"I am the skull of Iskander!" replied the right-hand one.

"And ye were two fools!" croaked the upper, all eyes watching it as the *fakir* turned his upward.

"I had gold in my day!" announced the Akbar skull.

"I had more! I had more!" the thing that named itself Iskander answered. And the audience thrilled. They were Hindus. Neither of those famous kings had been of their faith.

"Where is the gold now?" croaked the upper skull.

"I buried mine!" said Akbar.

"I buried mine!" Iskander answered.

"Where?" demanded the skull on top.

"I forget!" said the right-hand skull.

"I lost the secret!" said the one on the left.

"I keep the secret!" croaked the upper one.

"Who art thou?" asked the Akbar skull.

"I am a woman in a leopard-skin! I am *she* who knows the secret! They who have the right should follow me!"

"Yes! Whoever is not afraid of the spirits that guard the secret, follow!" piped the fat man; and the greater part of the audience trembled, glancing sidewise at one another and remaining seated. They were no such fools as to trespass into ancient secrets. Some began to run away, fearing sorcery.

Tossing the skulls from hand to hand the *fakir* disappeared into the temple. The courtyard emptied. The men in yellow, led by Jeff and Narayan Singh carrying the basket, followed the *fakir* one by one. Another of India's everyday marvels was a thing gone by, to be discussed and magnified and finally forgotten or else woven into the fabric of religious legend.

Jeff and Narayan Singh walked swiftly. They wanted to speak, but did not dare, for

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they could not out-distance the bronze man at their heels; and the others came equally fast, breaking into a run as the *fakir* disappeared down an opening in the hollow-shaped floor of a dark chamber.

The *fakir* was all alone, and seemed in haste. (No sign of the fat impresario.) In darkness they could hear the *fakir's* naked feet shuffling along an echoing tunnel, and the big bronze man urged Jeff and Narayan Singh to run. Jeff kicked something, and a hollow rattle announced a skull bouncing away in the dark ahead of him. The bronze giant's toes struck another one, and a man somewhere behind them kicked the third. The *fakir* had abandoned his dead oracles! He appeared to be in full flight.

That was too much for the giant. He thrust Narayan Singh aside and rushed by, following by ear, bellowing back to the crowd to hurry after him. And as the first half-dozen forced themselves between Narayan Singh and the right-hand wall the blade of a knife passed between his wrist and Ramsden's. The thongs that held them together parted, and a voice said:

"Wisely, *sahibs!* Hold the basket as before!"

They turned to look, but could not see. The tunnel was alive with men who hurried by them, until every man of the seventy had passed, excepting one. He tugged at them.

"Now turn back!" he urged excitedly.

"Who are you?" Jeff asked, but he could not answer. The Sikh had him by the throat and was burning the darkness with his eyes, trying to recognize him.

"Quick! Who are you?" Jeff repeated.

As he spoke the faint reflection of a far-off flash of light lifted the darkness, like Summer-lightning. Simultaneously Jeff and the Sikh recognized the prisoner whom Ali had kept dry. He was scared—in pain because of fingers clutching at his throat—but unmistakeable. The Sikh let go.

"Quick! Come away!" he gasped, pulling at them.

Both men answered with the curt laugh that expresses resolution but no humor. They did not propose to leave friend *fakir*-Jeremy alone in the van of that stampede.

"Where's Chullunder Ghose?" Jeff blurted. The babu was to have been on hand to keep them posted.

"Ali? Where is Ali?" Narayan Singh demanded—presumably of the gods who order men's affairs.

"I don't know! Something has gone wrong! Ghandava sahib said—I promised him——"

They did not stay to listen.

"Forward, *sahib!*" urged Narayan Singh, and the whistling air announced that he had drawn steel from under the yellow smock.

"Fools!" said the voice of the man in yellow, but they left him standing.

It was blind work—blind as Jeremy's must have been. Holding each other they charged at top speed into night in which they could see nothing but the blood behind their own eyes. Once another flash in front of them lifted the darkness for a second; but it was only as if it were the echo of a strong light; it made matters worse by confusing the darkness, filling imagination with a million terrors.

THEN something—some one—animal or man—in headlong flight toward them, the noise of his hurrying feet all mixed in the volleying echoes of the stampede on ahead! Impossible to guess! It might be the tail end of the mob returning. Echo of another flash—then din incredible that drove the ear-drums inward—then it—he—who—whatever it was diving headlong under the swipe of the Sikh's sword and clinging to their legs to save himself!

"For God's sake!"

"Jeremy!"

"Rammy, old top! Quick! Help me up! No—stand here! Stop them! Some'll come back! Something's wrong!"

"What is it?"

"God knows! Juice didn't work or something! Half of 'em dead and the other half milling around the cave to find things! Pitch black—blazing light—pitch black again—and every one crazy! Got a knife, Narayan Singh?"

"A saber, *sahib!*"

"Good. Swat them!"

It was time! Another flash, fiercer than any yet, and a blast of hot wind followed by the scurrying of feet. The Sikh sprang forward, and they heard the swish and thump of his weapon as he struck down three men in succession. Then a scuffle, and the Sikh's cry of warning as a man burst by him.

Jeff charged—blind—bull-headed—at an enemy he could only hear—and in a second was at death-grips with the giant who had acted janitor! He recognized the fellow's grip again—the deadly enormous strength

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and the python-hug, crushing and releasing, crushing and releasing. Then, in another of those echo-flashes he could see his face leering with thick lips——

"Quick! Oh God! That's the end!" yelled Jeremy. "Come, you fellows! Water! For the love of——"

He never knew afterward whether he saw the end first or sensed it coming. There was a blinding flash, and a din beyond imagining—then wind—a hot blast— scouring out the tunnel, driving them in front of it like wads down a gun-barrel, until it ceased in what seemed vacuum. Lungs ached, and they retched; but a blast of air ice-cold by contrast, came whistling back, providing breath, but no other surcease, for they heard like a flood at war with fire the seething roar of water, and the earth's foundations seemed to shake beneath them.

"Are you there?" yelled Jeremy, groping wildly for his friends.

Narayan Singh gripped him by the shoulder, and the two turned back for Jeff. They stumbled on him, wrapped in death-grip with his adversary. The Sikh's foot struck home into the bronze giant's stomach. Jeff's fist, breaking from a python-hold, descended like a pole-ax on the giant's neck, and in a second the three were careering headlong for the tunnel's end with the pressure of a full gale and the roar of a boiling flood so near behind them that in their spines they knew the very feel of death. By the arms the two dragged Jeff waist-deep out of surging water that followed and swamped the hollow temple floor, and the three fell all together gasping in the sunshine on the portico.

There presently Chullunder Ghose, still smeared with ashes and half-naked, came to them with the erstwhile prisoner in yellow close at hand.

"Where's Ali?" gasped Narayan Singh.

"Gone—to the North—with Gauri and her maid. She has a dowry, hasn't she?" the babu answered. "The son has the maid and no money, but is young! The other son has hope, and an example!"

"Where are Grim and King?" demanded Jeff.

"Hunting for me, *sahib!* Angry! They will grow calm, learning all is well. I am abject individual who accepted bribe from Ali to arrange elopement. Lacking prospect of a share in infinite supply of gold, what *could* I do? But they are angry—very!"

Nonchalantly he toyed with one great emerald ear-stud.

"Am not altruist," he confessed significantly.

"What do *you* want here?" demanded Jeremy, looking straight into the face of the erstwhile prisoner.

"Where is the Ghandava sahib?" he answered humbly. "I would thank him. He is that member of the Nine Unknown whom I was to have killed! I went to him, and he offered me a chance to redeem myself. Where is he?"

"Gone! Gone! Gone! I keep telling you. Fool! Begone too!" the babu answered.

"Gone where?"

King and Grim, sweating and angry, baffled—forgetting to play their parts now—came rushing across the temple courtyard and heard the babu's answer.

"God knows! He is gone! He told me to say good-by to all of you," Chullunder Ghose explained. "Self am not sorry. He gave me creeps."

They went and pounded on the door of the house where they had been lodged, but none answered, and they desisted in fear of the police. But the police were all busy on the water-front, where an ancient ruin on which *fakirs* used to stand in turns, had vanished into the stream—by earthquake, as the newspapers asserted—although no seismographs recorded any in Benares.

So they dismissed Chullunder Ghose and, dressing themselves as honest men again, returned by train to Delhi in search of Cyprian. They discovered him, back in his own home, being nursed by Manoel, who looked ashamed—repentant.

"He stole a page from one of the occult books. I found the rascal in a back street—starting a new religion!"

Cyprian sighed, then continued:

"But he is not all bad. He has been a comfort. See, my sons—my house is clean again!"

THE END

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A Complete Novelette

# Empty Country

## By BARRY SCOBEE

*Author of "The Rain," "Contrary Men," etc.*

AN EMPTY land, motionless, lifeless, hot under the still sun, stretching out north, south, east, west, across dun country to remote clumps of smoky gray mountains. A land to hate, and he hated it.

The soldier had come in to roll and tumble on his bunk in the barrack-room, a victim of mental and physical unrest. It was the first day utterly without a stir of air.

He had been nursing his hate. Now on this worst day it was rebelling like an overgrown child. He sat up abruptly, a new thought taking hold. He would see the captain and demand a furlough! He got his hat and started.

If he got a furlough he knew well enough what he would do. If he could get out of this empty land to the railway—it wouldn't take him long to do it, either. He would go over the hill, desert, beat it back to civilization.

He'd been nursing this idea too for several days. But there was a barrier—ninety empty miles from the Rio Grande to rails.

He caught sight of the tall, gaunt captain crossing the sandy drill-ground, and cut across to intercept him. At six paces he saluted sullenly. Cornelius came to a stop.

"Well, McDonald," said he cheerily, "what is it?"

"I want a furlough!" the soldier jerked out ungraciously.

Many officers would have asked him if he had permission from the first sergeant to speak. Cornelius was of a different breed.

"Hot day, ain't it?"

He mopped his face.

"Hot when it wrings sweat out of a skinny man."

"Hotter'n the knobs of ——! Look at that!" McDonald flung an arm out petulantly. "Not a breath movin'!"

"Still, we don't get sunstroke down here—Furlough? How long have you been with us? Two months, ain't it?"

"Nine weeks."

"—sir."

"What?"

"—sir."

"Nine weeks—sir."

McDonald gave the formal military reply grudgingly. The captain's insistence irritated him. He wanted to blow up, run amuck. Also he wanted the furlough. So he kept his shirt on.

"Look here," Cornelius was touched with friendly earnestness now. "What's the matter with you? You haven't been soldiering up to Hoyle. This morning at drill—look at that legging, only half-rolled! McDonald, you don't want to be the worst soldier in these two troops."

McDonald would not look down at the legging. He glared at his captain, sullen, ready to explode.



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"I'm sorry to see it this way, lad. You've got the makings of a first-class soldier, but you're acting like a first class —— Why, man, you're standing there now boiling over with mad. What at? Why don't you snap out of it?"

"Because I don't have to!" flared the soldier.

"I'm sorry," repeated Cornelius, still unruffled, in fact quite the contrary, as gentle as a comradely father. "Tell me about it, son. This way is going hard with you."

"Then give me a furlough!"

The officer hesitated. McDonald thought he was considering about the furlough. But Cornelius was pondering how to proceed with this rebellious soldier. He decided to continue with soft word and explanation, which he had found effective more times than not.

"There are rumors," said the officer, who was in command of the little garrison, flicking a thumb southward, "that Mexicans are gathering on the other side. That may mean coming raids, killings, on this side. I have——"

"There's always rumors. Every old-time loafer in the shade tells about 'em."

"I have fewer than a hundred men here now. They're all needed. You're needed. We're put here to guard our frontier. Duty. Strict duty."

McDonald did not have ears to hear nor understanding to perceive the kindliness. His mind was against the country, was set on getting out. To him Cornelius was just a grim voice speaking of worse than grim duty. He was a barrier, a bond tying his feet.

"You don't like this great sunny, open country, do you, McDonald?" Cornelius asked.

"Like it!"

The private slowly swung his gaze from east to west, seeing the gray mountains, the dun land between, the dusty mesquite, the flat river, the sand under foot, the emptiness, the vastness of it all. On his countenance was scorn and hate, and fear, too, that could never be expressed in words.

"Like it!" he cried out. "This godless, cussed country? This emptiness? This bigness that's too —— big, so that it's like a stuffy jail? They put me in jail once and kept me four months and turned me loose without a trial. I thought there wasn't anything worse than that, but now——"

His gesture, his very attitude, expressed his inwardness.

"I'd rather be in jail. You got four walls around you there."

"McDonald," and the captain spoke softly, "if you got a furlough and got to the railroad you'd never come back, would you?"

The soldier's countenance fell. His hatred had betrayed him, but he saw it as the officer having trapped him. He flared with wrath.

"No, ——, I wouldn't!" he shouted.

"You'd desert."

"Yes! And I'm going to desert! You hear me? I'm going to desert!"

"Don't do it, Mac," advised Cornelius, not harshly. "We'll catch you sure's you're born, and that'll mean Alcatraz or Leavenworth for two or three years. I don't want to see you go that route."

Cornelius knew when words were done. He strode on. McDonald looked after him, wanting to spring and seize and tear and maul, wanting to do awful damage to this man who was so calm, so certain, so powerful, who had trapped him with his secret plan.

"I'll get even, I'll get even," he sputtered to himself.

He headed toward the picket line, behind the Q.M. storehouse, where two long rows of horses drooped, or munched hay, under the hot sun.

TO MAKE certain whether or not he was pursued, McDonald reigned his horse from the brush and rode up the sandy slope until he could see out over the mesquite flat.

Three miles away, across the crooked green bushes, lay the white-washed cavalry barracks he had just left, and the mud town of Mariposa on beyond in a loop of the green-fringed Rio Grande.

The mid-afternoon heat was still and tense even here on this elevation in the open. More of the world could be comprehended here, but yet it had no motion, save the almost imperceptible drifting of buzzards high, high in the sky. The dust fogged up around man and horse and clung thickly because there was no slightest breeze to move it aside.

The soldier made an impatient gesture to brush the dust away. He looked from the sky to the vast emptiness of Mexico,

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looked at the winding river, at the mesquite flat he had traversed, at the sand and shale underfoot. No pursuit, no motion anywhere. For a second he was panicky at this aloneness.

A question that had held him back for days rose up now and looked him in the eye. Could he escape in this vast, empty land? Would he not be revealed as the only moving figure all the way from here to the railway—revealed to any pursuing eye? Would not men, watching with the keenness of the buzzards overhead, see him and surround him.

He made an indefinable movement of the whole body—the stirring of the impulse to swing his horse and ride down into the brush and ride, speed on. But at the inception of the action a noise, a clatter of loose shale, came from a roadway up the slope, and a Mexican materialized from a little cloud of dust.

The man was barefooted. He wore a great peaked sombrero, had on rags instead of clothes. Over his shoulder by a strap was swung a water-bag, and this canvas container, McDonald saw when the peon came nearer, was lumpy—as if it contained cracked ice rather than water. The fellow pulled up, studying the soldier sharply through slit eyes.

"You want get rich?" he asked out of space.

"—— no!" retorted McDonald derisively.

"You buy *oro*?"

"Bi-r-o?" the American puzzled.

To clarify his question, the peon unstoppered the lumpy water-bag and poured a half-dozen pea-sized pebbles and held them out on his palm.

"Gold," he said. "Nuggets."

McDonald stooped down from the saddle and poked the pebbles questioningly with a forefinger, felt one between finger and thumb.

"Gold!" he croaked. "Where'd you get it?"

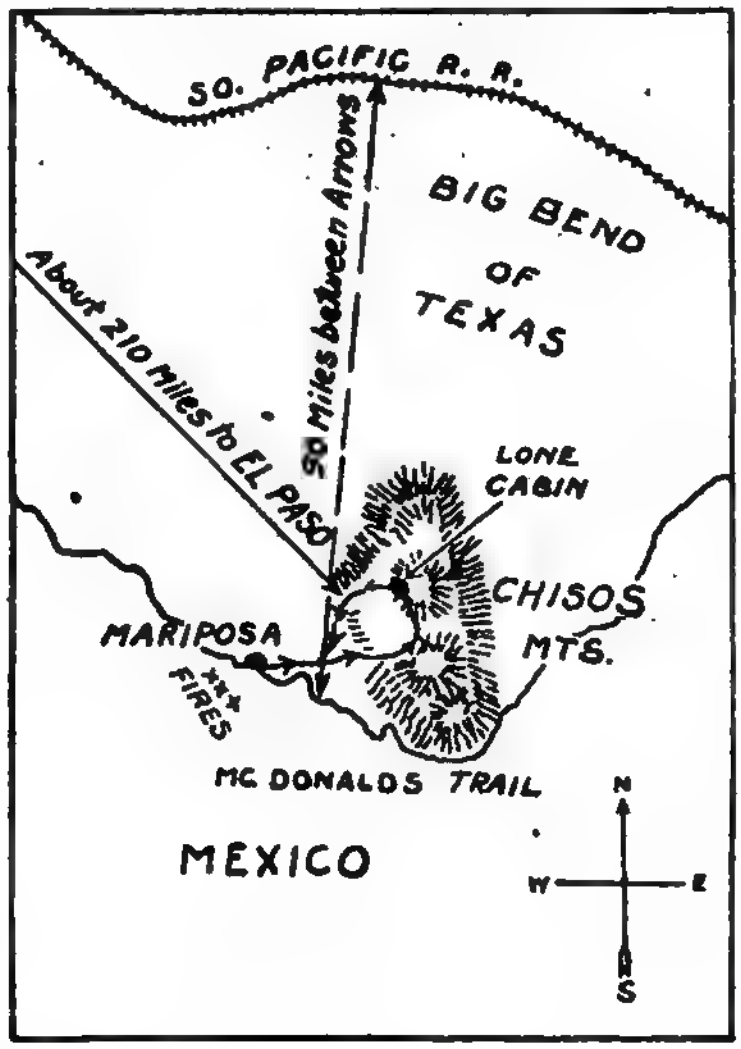
The man smirked with facile mouth and brows, and made a gesture that took in all the visible world and space.

"You buy eet?" he urged.

McDonald could have answered without delay, for he had less than a dollar. But his thoughts were whirling with stories he had heard from the old-timers loafing in the shade, talking of rumors of raids, and of gold in every gulch and every bend of the river, gold all over the Big Bend of Texas, or in northern Mexico. If he had gold he could escape, could literally buy his way to the railroad and on to freedom.

"Where'd you get it?" he barked. "Come across!"

Suggestively he laid a hand upon a protruding butt of the big blue automatic Army pistol he had got from the farrier's tent




at the picket-line—at the same time he had got a canteen and blanket and ammunition and had told the stable guard that he was riding out on an emergency.

McDonald saw gather in the black eyes of the Mexican the look of one who weaves a lie, and saw gather there too a bit of stubbornness, a flick of animosity toward the gringo. And he realized that he could not easily find out where the gold came from.

He surveyed the empty land again, pondering. If one of those three or four old-timers who loafed in the shade at Mariposa and poured tales into recruits' ears were only here he would know how to extract information from a stubborn Mex. And if they knew about this gold they'd extract the information too, no doubt of that! If they knew about this gold they'd be on the canter right now. A stampede. If the soldiers knew about it——

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McDonald paused with a sort of bump. A thought spread through his mind, many thoughts. They rushed like cataracts. They were an inspiration—a great overwhelming inspiration for revenge and escape. The biggest thing that had ever come to him.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed.

He reached down suddenly and seized the Mexican by his rags.

"Crawl up behind me!" he ordered.

He half-jerked the man up behind the saddle. He gripped his pistol.

"Don't try any tricks," he admonished. "Stay right exactly where you are, *savvy?* I'll show you where to get rid of your gold."

"What you do?"

"Never mind. Wait and see."

McDonald guided the horse back the way he had come, southwest toward the whitewashed garrison buildings. At first the mesquite, with its green, dusty foliage, was high enough to conceal a man on horseback, but a quarter of a mile from the post the bushes became shorter, revealing them, head and shoulder. Whereupon he dismounted, secured the horse, and went on afoot. Just within the edge of the brush he halted the Mexican, warning him against trying tricks, and they squatted and looked across the cleared sandy space toward what might be termed the rear of the picket line.

The two lines of drooping horses were within easy pistol shot. The stable guard meandered about, gabbing, against regulations, with a sentry on post. McDonald got out a small notebook from his front shirt pocket and began to write a note.

Flynn, etc.

This Mex has got it sack of gold. He wont tell you where he got it but Im gessing it was ne of here in the mountains Spread the knews and start the hunt, you dog robbers.

He started to sign "Mac" but remembered the boys didn't call him that here. He had missed that term. In a way he knew it was his own fault. They wouldn't know who Mac was, so he signed McDonald.

The startling result—he could see it mentally. He would have been elated, would perhaps have chuckled, but he had no time to loiter. He wanted to get away.

"Look here, Mex," he ordered, "put your eyes on those two soldiers there with the horses."

"Yees, *señor*."

"Take this note. Give it to them. *Savvy?*"

"For why?" The man accepted the paper. "What she say?"

"This is 'for why,'" and McDonald dragged out the big pistol. "It's going to keep its big black eye on you till you give that paper to those men. Get me?"

"Yees."

The peon got himself to his bare feet reluctantly. He looked at the paper, and the men, and the gun ruefully

"Go on!"

He stepped out of the brush and began to walk rapidly toward the picket line.

"Fly straight," called McDonald, "or I'll go to crow-peckin' at your feet with lead."

The Mexican walked fast the first fifty yards, then he began to slow down. At about half-way of the hundred fifty yards he stopped and looked back, as if to try out whether the gun still watched from the brush. The stable guard and the sentry became interested in the ragged one's approach. McDonald upped with the gun and fired a shot back into the brush. The messenger jumped and ran the rest of the way to the two gawking soldiers.

McDonald saw the peon hand something to the men, saw the men assume a head-to-head attitude of reading, saw them look toward him a minute later. Then one of the pair reached out a hand as if to the lumpy water-bag. McDonald hurried back to his horse.

GOLD and rumors of gold have been the portion of the Big Bend for half a century. But there have been more rumors than gold, for the rumors are measured only by the yarns of ranchers, adventurers and soldiers, while the authentic gold is measured by—well, there's the story of the nugget that stood out with all the startling bigness of the Kohinoor diamond, and the story of the old Mescalero Apache who appeared with a red bandanna lumpy with nuggets, and the tale of the Reagan brothers, and a lot of others told with even more gusto.

Of the "Kohinoor nugget" it is told that it was given to a railroad conductor at Sanderson, on the Southern Pacific railway that forms the northern boundary of the Big Bend. The giver is unknown to history, but the gleaming pebble started the story that there was a gold-mine in the Big Bend.

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Then the Reagan brothers. They had a cow-camp on the Rio Grande del Norte and had a negro for horse-rustler. One morning this hand went out to run in the grazing remuda and did not return until nightfall. He showed one of the Reagans a handful of pebbles he said was gold he had found in his "goold mind." Reagan, out of sorts perhaps over a lost day's work, struck the stuff out of his hand in all directions.

But the next morning, when the camp was at breakfast, the negro came dragging in again with a handful of the pebbles. He laid them on a flat stone where the Señor Reagan was breakfasting. Reagan, so the story goes, swept them into the camp litter.

"Copper and dirt," he said. "Boy, you're not hired to hunt gold. You're hired to 'tend horses. See that you 'tend 'em."

However the black man could not let the gold alone. Searching a few days later, he came upon a Mexican who warned him that the Reagans were on his trail for neglecting the horses. The negro pulled out and was seen no more hunting for the metal.

As an odd follow-up, it is written that later, when prospectors from all over the West were busy washing at the black sand of the Grand River of the North, or hacking at the burned-out igneous rock of the mountains in hope of finding a live vein, the Reagans caught the gold taste, and having no time themselves, employed a prospector from California at ten dollars a day to hunt for the negro's mine. At the end of six months, with no gold found, the Reagans shipped eighty head of fat cattle to market to pay the prospector's bill.

There are men today in Marfa and Alpine, on the S. P., who tell of seeing an old Apache chief come down from the Mescalero Reservation in New Mexico and disappear in the wastes of the Big Bend. A few days later he reappeared at a remote settlement near the Rio with gold nuggets in a strong bandanna.

The Big Bend has been listening for a generation or two to these ever new yarns and the men, if not exactly on hair trigger and rarin' to go, at least have an ear cocked and hope in their hearts. Now and then one will thoughtfully gaze off across the empty land, or crumble rotten stone in his fingers, or sift sand, and they who know the country can guess pretty accurately at what he is thinking about. Some day, somebody—discover gold—a rush—incoming hordes—staking out claims—nugget-gold——

It was against this background of golden legend that McDonald sent the Mexican to the pair of soldiers at the picket line; against this gilded curtain that the story of gold exploded.

The deserter remembered these things in detail as he rode toward the Chisos Mountains, to the eastward. But he was hoping more, far more, for escape than for gold when he came upon his next curious adventure.

It was a meeting late in the day, when the shadows were long and grotesque, this adventure was, with a Mexican who was on foot. He wore hobnailed laced boots, and rough but whole clothing, and had a jaw as thick and square almost as McDonald's own.

"*Buenos tardes, señor,*" greeted the man in the Border manner, touching his sombrero. "A warm day."

McDonald's eye caught sight of a shortened, narrowed burlap sack hanging at the man's side from a band over one shoulder. The bag looked lumpy and heavy.

"What you got in that sack?" he demanded.

The fellow studied the soldier coolly. He was not visibly armed. Somehow he gave the impression that he regarded the American with contempt. Without a word he dipped into the bag and held out golden nuggets on his palm, and a square of paper was mixed with them. He took the paper with the other hand, quickly.

McDonald caught his breath, and as if there were but one question to ask, he asked it—

"Where'd you get it?"

The son of the southern republic grinned, spreading his little black mustache, and gestured generously around the horizon.

"All right," snapped McDonald, still sullen. "What's on that paper?"

Before the Mexican could step back McDonald bent down and snatched the paper. In the quick movement the nuggets were knocked into the sand. The man stooped to gather them up frantically.

McDonald jerked the paper open. It was a map drawn in red and black on ordinary ruled "pen and ink" paper.

He was not unfamiliar with maps. A blanket-stiff of wheat-fields, corn-husker in Nebraska, freight-handler at Lincoln, follower of seasons and crops and work, he was



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used to conning railway maps, or even crude drawings of fellow 'boes, showing the location of farms or jobs. So now his quick eye made out at once the broad and curving line that meant the Rio Grande, and the black clump that was the Chinetas, and on the right, or east, of the map, the Chisos Range, that in reality loomed up before his eyes in all their rugged grandeur. And down in the heart of these mountains, on the map, was a circle in red ink with the caption—

Indian stone map and
ancient trail somewhere in this

The whole map was lettered "Chart to gold beds, stone map the key."

The Mexican straightened from picking up his gold and leaped for the paper.

McDonald fended him off with one arm, and in the very act he caught the impression that the Mexican's resistance was a sham, his effort to get the map a fraud.

There was no steel edge on the brown fellow's light muscular motions. He simply made motions, and not effort.

McDonald, holding the paper out of reach, stopped his fending—and the Mexican stopped his fake effort. He stood for one moment looking up, while the soldier looked down at him, eye to eye. Then the fellow, as if seeing something to sap his courage, slid away and began to run off through the mesquite.

"Well I'll be hanged!" McDonald exclaimed to himself, looking after the diminishing figure. "What got into him?"

Keeping an eye out for tricks, he went over the map carefully. Undoubtedly with it he could quickly locate the places indicated. The gold the Mexican had had somehow lent authenticity to the drawing.

The mountains lay ahead, deep blues gathering in the cañons, lavenders along the sides, the clear-cut peaks, beyond which was freedom, marking the sky. The Nebraska corn-husker, the roving wheatfield hand, the deserter, was thrilled by what lay ahead.

He rode onward, his own progress the only visible movement now in this motionless land.

OLD-TIMERS in the Big Bend of Texas tell that back in the early days of the cattle domain they found running across the great roots and butresses of the Chisos Range—ancient disintegrating mountains—a trail cut wide and deep through the rock and earth by the feet of countless millions of—who?—marching back and forth between north and south, perhaps before the Prophet of Nazareth trod the sands of Galilee.

From the tales of those whose hobby is Indian lore, it appears that in the olden days the redskins left the upper reaches of the Brazos River, of the Red, the Arkansas, and even of the distant Kaw, and trekked south, entering the Great Trail at the mammoth gushing Comanche spring at Fort Stockton—ages before white man set foot on the American continent.

That spring must have been to the Southwest what Honolulu is to the Pacific; the great Cross Roads place where nations and commerce and religions meet, and friends greet again, and the human stream goes on and on. Undoubtedly Cabeza de Vaca and his three comrades, the first of Europeans to cross the western world starting in what is now the United States, paused at the mighty up-rush of water, and continued their journey southward along the Appian Way of savagery.

The ancient far-traveling tribes between north and south must have left some of their peoples, because the Big Bend was anciently inhabited, as crumbling irrigation works prove. And these people must have been the forefathers of the Tobosos and Mescal Pit Diggers, who are regarded as the immediate parents of the Apaches.

Within the history of Texas the Apaches and Comanches rode back and forth on this trail. They had in their calendar a month called the Mexican moon—an Autumn month, perhaps the one that brought frosty mornings on the Texas rivers. But ponies' hoofs never cut the Great Trail, because it was carved out by passing feet centuries before the horse came, and the Comanches rode themselves into the name of Horsemen of the Plains. It was in the Mexican moon that the tribes, in feathers and paint, went marauding down across the Grand River of the North into the land of the Spaniard and the southern Indian.

There was a system of trails in the Big Bend. They were so important to the red men that back in the dim past they hacked out maps on the faces of huge boulders. There is one in a remote region, at the site of an Indian arrowhead factory, that may be the master map of the entire system.

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Close around it, on the underside of leaning stones, are Indian characters painted in cinnabar. Then there are other maps and paintings here and there, probably of far less significance.

The old-timers, in the shade, filled McDonald's ears with these things because they thought he was interested. But his interest was not so much in these things as in killing the time that hung heavy on his hands in this land of torment. Heat, nothing to do for himself, military routine, idleness, and above all the vast emptiness. When National Guardsmen from eastern states arrived on the border in 1916, to back up Pershing in Mexico, they looked around them and asked with a sort of mixed sarcasm and incredulity—

"What do we want to save this country from the Mexicans for, anyhow?"

McDonald felt just that way about it, and he listened to the old men's tales of the Great Trail and gold lore because there was nothing else to do. He wished now he had listened with a whole ear.

He slept on the sand under his blanket, and a mesquite bush, and the stars. For breakfast he shot—that was the one military thing he could do well, shoot straight—shot with his pistol one of those long-bodied birds that the Mexicans call *paisanos* and that Yankees call road-runners. He put in an hour broiling it. Afterward he began the abrupt ascent of the mountains where they rose from the flat.

McDonald was controlled this morning by one dominant intention—to get up into the fastnesses out of sight and out of reach, and watch back to see how his inspired scheme worked out.

When he thought of the plan—the sending of the Mexican into the garrison with the gold, and the effect—as a success he chuckled down inside. What a revenge, and what a scheme for escape! But when he thought of its failure he unconsciously pushed the bay over the rough going at greater speed.

Over all, however, he was sinister, a bit desperate. A thought came to him—

"The land is merciless to me, I'll be merciless too."

Maybe the thought was not that clear and definite, but the sense was in him. He felt that if necessary he might go so far as to kill, yet he shrank at this idea, for he did not want to kill.

The sun got up over the corner of the mountains, but it was not high enough yet to gouge out the haze and shadows of the cañons and flat lands and reveal what might have developed there.

It occurred to the lone rider that as a deserter he was an outlaw, a hunted man, for whom a standing reward was offered. Some of that mind which is in the outlaw, the hunted train robber or highwayman, entered him. He became harder, more watchful. He remembered for the first time he had not only deserted but had taken—stolen—an Army horse and Government equipment.

His horse got into an old trail-like gash and began to follow it. McDonald thought it might be the Great Trail. It wound around the edge of a cañon and presently dropped down into the cañon at an easy slope. Down in the niche of the mountains the trail disappeared. The precipitous bluffs shut out any view of the countryside, so that he could not watch the flats for developments.

He traversed the short cañon, but could not find the trail out at the other end, so that he had to make a climb of it, and two hours elapsed before he was again on a headland that enabled him to survey the country.

And what he saw made him tense sharply there in the saddle.

He had ascended until his gaze took in a great segment of northern Mexico, and of Texas, and the river. An Atlantic State or two could have been set down in the territory under his eye. The sun had driven back to their original unreality the shadows below. The sky was unflecked by cloud, the air was crystal.

And down at the beginning of the slope, just beginning to ascend, were two—four—five—groups of horsemen!

As his eyes became used to microscopic looking and picking out and separating objects from the gray-dun background, he made out three more moving specks, of one or two men each probably.

A laugh was beginning to rise up in him. His scheme had worked. He had stampeded the soldiers to hunt for gold. That was revenge on the captain who had tricked his secret.

But more important, he had put moving figures on the face of this motionless country—moving figures that would conceal him—him, as a pebble is concealed openly

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on the pebbly beach, or a leaf is hid in the forest.

"I wouldn't 'a' done it," thought he, viewing the widecast spectacle, "if he'd given me a furlough."

And if McDonald had carried the thought out logically, he would have added—

"So I could have deserted in the usual safe, sane and ordinary method."

Then a jarring thought obtruded. Suppose these men were not out to hunt gold but to hunt him!

He jerked around to see if he or the horse were in a position to be silhouetted against the sky. The background chanced to be gray-red stone.

Another astartling thing came. Off a quarter or a half-mile to the northward, riding down a hogback was a man on a horse. The remarkable visibility existent in the clear air of this country enabled McDonald to get at least the outlines accurately. The man was long and lank, grotesquely out of proportion to the pony he rode, and he wore a huge, flopping hat. The picture made McDonald think of a pantomime show.

So civilians were out too. Why sure, if the soldiers jumped the garrison to join a gold-rush—if that was why they were out here—it stood to reason that every adventurer and ranchman the country over would be Johnny-on-the-spot also, out in force to hunt the yellow metal.

He studied the men below afresh. Some, riding directly toward him, looked like exclamation marks! No more identity. They might be civilians too, instead of soldiers. But no, these turning off to the north were soldiers. Something about the outline was unmistakable. Yet as soldiers neither they, nor those back there, rode in any recognized military formation.

He watched until high noon. More men came out of the distances toward Mariposa. These first ones, reaching the ascent of the mountains, invariably turned northward. They were going to that spot of the mountains where the map showed the red circle, where the stone map and the gold would be.

But he had the map, not they! Could there be two maps on paper?

McDonald bestirred himself, wondering what best to do. And in the very act the answer came—another inspiration!

Why not let the men below find the gold for him? If he rode on to the railway and escaped from this country he would have no money to go on, unless he could find somebody unwise enough to buy the branded Army horse and equipment. But if he got his hands on nuggets they would be the same as coin of the mint.

If he went down into the gullies and cañons hunting for the trail and the stone map he would have just one pair of eyes to use, and he would not be able to keep a general lookout. But if he went higher up the mountains and included the whole vast middle slope—where the red circle was drawn—in his view, he would have as many pairs of eyes searching for the gold in his behalf, so to speak, as there would be men, and he could maintain a general surveillance of the situation and be warned if it turned up best for him to hurry out.

And if the men found the gold, they would be seen to bunch to the field like wolves to a kill, and he could go down and make a grab in some manner or other. Leave that to another inspiration!

The idea appealed to him tremendously. For the time he forgot the empty country, stepped out of its oppression by stepping into a feeling of power and romance.

A hundred, a thousand eyes searching for gold for him. He, one pair of eyes, like the buzzards high in the thin air, watching the thousand pairs.

"I'll be hung," he said to himself; "why couldn't I have thought of big things this way in Nebraska?"

He began to ride again, trying to ascend and at the same time travel northward so that he could gain a place to overlook the middle areas of the range. He cautiously kept off of ridges, away from the probability of silhouetting himself against the sky.

He called himself a gay outlaw, a slick *hombre*, and facetiously dubbed himself a good corn-husker gone astray.

But toward midafternoon he got a jolt that took some of his self-esteem away.

The jolt was to see suddenly a saddled horse a stone's throw ahead of him. He felt small to think he hadn't seen the animal sooner, though against the rocky background it was concealed with all the natural camouflage that is a partridge's in a bunch of old grass.

He stopped stock still to look for the man who belonged in the saddle. His own mount started to neigh. He checked the sound with a quick grip of the nostrils. Foot

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by foot he searched the rocks for a man—and after two full minutes made him out at least three hundred yards down the slope on hands and knees looking at a wash of loose rock.

McDonald dismounted. Out of the saddle he could not see over the rim to watch the man. He perceived that his horse could not be seen by the man. He led Sixty-three, as his mount was called when assigned to him, to where the other bay, a lean ranch horse, stood hitched to a cedar.

There was a canteen. McDonald drank liberally of the sun-hot water. A pair of saddle-bags contained sandwiches. There was a coat tied under the cantle with thongs. He tried to try it on, hoping to find a civilian coat as the start of full civilian attire, but it was too small even to get the sleeves on. He ate a sandwich hurriedly, and as he began on a second one he crept to the edge of the rock and looked down the slope.

The boy, for such he seemed, was in the act of rising from hands and knees. He brushed his hands together and seemed to shrug in disgust. McDonald had hoped this would be the place of gold and felt a slight disappointment at these signs. Then the boy came striding up the hill, looking as if trying to locate just where he had left his horse.

The deserter went back and stuffed two sandwiches into his pockets. In the act he shook from a flap of the bag a square of ruled "pen and ink" paper.

He lost no time. It was his full intention not to be seen by this fellow. He wanted no word of himself to be broadcasted down below among the soldiers or deputy sheriffs or rangers. He unfolded the paper. There before his eyes was a map precisely like his own. To make certain he unfolded his own. Without question they had been drawn by the same hand.

He put the paper back in the bag and hurried on, a much puzzled man.

A SHELF of the mountains green with grass from the mid-August rains, an open space the size of a city square sentineled with tall and ancient pines, and back under the trees, by a cliff, a small square house or shack of stones. McDonald came upon it as unexpectedly as he had come upon the boy's horse. He got himself and Sixty-three behind a boulder, and, camouflaged, watched the place for some movement.

The door of the little shack was shut. Crows alighted on the shake roof and slid off in silent crow cunning to hunt for morsels around the door. A shed evidently for horses was empty. There was yet an hour of sun. White Angora goats came up a path at the farther end of the shelf, a string of twenty or so, and at what was obviously a trough near the shanty they began to bleat.

He waited ten minutes longer, and seeing no human movement, went to the door, and finding it unlocked, peered in. The one room was shy an occupant, but was otherwise inviting enough to a tired and hungry man. Gentle hens flocked around his feet clucking their supper talk. The goats drew him by their thirsty bleating and he watered them from a spring under the cliff. He was astonished at how little goats drank.

Keeping an eye out for the approach of the owner, or owners—there were two bunks, one above the other—he fed Sixty-three and the chickens a little shelled corn, and staked the horse out on the grass. Then on the sheet-iron stove within he fried eggs and boiled coffee, and found cold corn-bread and barbecued goat. It all went exceedingly well, for there was a bite in the air at this altitude.

Over him all the while was a sense of uneasiness—the vast space around, the emptiness, the utter aloneness. From the shanty he could not see down the mountain-side, only limitless space south and west, over and beyond Mariposa that was miles and miles away. The loneness haunted him, made him quick to turn at sounds.

Just when the sun was halved by the molten horizon he finished inside and went out. An unexpected thing had come on. A breeze was stirring the trees. There was a faint sough, a mouse-squeaking of a creaking of the trunks and branches of the conifers. Had he been a sailor he would have likened it to the music of the sticks and sails of a schooner at the first touch of a breeze in the doldrums. He went and sat on the edge of the shelf, with two or three hundred feet of sheer depth below him. A gnarled and ancient cedar was close beside him, flattening itself against the cornice. The stars popped out, and two little dots of fires began to wink down below

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in the cañons, and three fires very bright, far, far off in Mexico, seemingly two or three miles apart.

He bedded in a far corner of the grassy pasture on a mat of pine-needles, well out of sight of any one who might come to the cabin in the night or morning. Under his blanket he spent a while wondering about the second map of the region he had seen, condemning it as another mystery of the country; and he faded off into sleep thinking of the mellow soughing of the pines as the rustle of a Nebraska breeze through August corn.

In the morning he breakfasted as he had suppered, and watered the goats, that made off up hill at once, and saddled Sixty-three and struck out up the slopes of the wild and rugged range.

He meandered back and forth, up and down, kicking in loose rock now and then in a crude attempt to prospect; keeping an eye out for the Great Trail, though if he had had an eye for mountainscapes he would have seen that no trail would have been made so high up, nor over such grandly rugged cañons and cliffs. His scheme of eagle-watching the hundred or thousand pairs of working eyes down below was a failure and a disappointment—another count against the country in his heart. Only occasionally could he make out a moving figure far down.

The air, toward noon, became utterly motionless again. Heat and white sunlight seemed to rest upon the world as inert weight. It depressed. Great rifts in the solid stone of the ancient mountains gaped around him. The heights were dizzy. When he and his horse stood still there was no sound. In all the vast and endless expanse of brazen sky and dun world there was no movement save the spiraling of the watching buzzards.

A little taint of panic got into the heart of the deserter. And a greater taint of hatred at the land which shackled him. He was becoming like an animal that has paced for days back and forth in the cage that is new to it, growing ever more sullen and mad, until at last it leaps and twists at the bars.

And all at once McDonald reached this degree. It did not express itself in frenzy, but in a sudden, final determination to go, to get out, to let the gold go hang and chance any obstacles in the far miles to the railroad.

He turned his horse due northeast, going by the noontime shadow of the sun, and struck out.

But he could not go straight. He went zig-zagging. He forced Sixty-three along a ridge of stone, with slopes on either side like a steep roof. He crept the horse along a shelf of disintegrating stone that crumbled under the hoofs and let the fine rock go rattling like seeds down and out of sight over the edge.

Then, farther on, the burned-out igneous rock crumbled and gave way, and horse and rider went sliding and twisting and scrambling down and down into a pocket.

Around him on three sides were precipitous cliffs. On the up side was a steep glare of hard granite-like stone, much cracked, and made smooth by ages of wind. Here and there in the cracks soil had accumulated—evidently by the winds blowing dust upon the mountains and the rains washing it into the crevasses. In these cracks were anchored the cedar-trees of the mountains—innocent trees that have laid themselves down upon the ground or the rocks under the mighty pressure of the wind-tides and waves, that have spread themselves out, catching with claws, or humping themselves as if to hold with knees and toes. They speak of the fine adaptability they possess for their life's bed. They are twisted of fiber and they are strong, strong. They speak of the tenacity of Life.

McDonald dismounted. He seized his horse's reins and began to climb up this slope. He labored and slaved and tugged, and slid back, or often was jerked back as the steel shoes of Sixty-three flashed from under his weight, with spark showers and smell of brimstone. Often they braced against the cedars, or made them hold-fasts for their feet.

But in this frantic climb, in this panting endeavor to assure himself that he could get out, could save himself, the cedars became, not friends but hideous things. To him they were gnarled, flattened monstrosities, their crooked trunks looking barkless like the weather-beaten boards of an old barn, clinging frantically. The one where he had sat the evening before on the shelf's edge was now in his mind like a cat in a scramble to cling to the top of a fence above pursuing dogs. These around him were like hunched dragons scrambling to hold their footing.

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At last, when he had scaled this slope, he shook his fist at the field of cedars and cursed. But he saw to what a pass he was coming by such conduct and got hold of himself.

He was on a high rim. He saw how futile was his effort to travel northeast, how impassable were the mountains, with vast silent chasms on every side, and merciless heights above and on above again. To escape thus was hopeless, and he took his only course—around the rim in an effort to get back to the shanty, which was the only human habitation, the only place of water and food, that he knew about available to him.

And this effort to return, to find his way, soon took on the hue of failure. For he had no landmarks. His prairie eyes had failed to pick out peaks and faces. And again, as the hours wore on, he became half-frantic, down under the surface. Panic growled and squirmed.

He desired just one thing through this—one thought was uppermost—to get out of this country.

And at last, when he stopped, when he put out his own human will and resigned himself to some higher thought, his vision cleared and he saw, not a quarter of a mile away, the string of white goats stepping daintily down the slope. He followed them. A turn and a walk and a downward going, and he was back on the grassy shelf.

A prairie man, he professed profanely, had no business in the mountains.

As he dismounted at the shack he was petrified by the sight, down the trail the goats had climbed up the night before, of a long lank figure astride a dun pony like a limber clothes-pin. But when McDonald saw that the man was old and evidently unarmed, and was coming forward mildly, he stood his ground. The long one came ambling up, sizing up the soldier, and in a moment called out in a quick staccato voice, like a mincing, bird-chirping aunt that McDonald could remember.

" 'Lo, stranger. Looking for gold too?"

"Is there any?" asked McDonald quickly. "Anybody found any?"

The man raised comical quizzical eyebrows. He slid off the pony over the rump. He was tall and his blue bib overalls were incredibly long and narrow. Ragged sandy hair spurted out under the rim of his little old black hat. McDonald instinctively thought of him as "old boy."

"By Henry," opined the old boy, "been all over these hills in the last year two and didn't find any. If they all find it in one two days they'll be jim-dandies."

"A —— of a country!" flung McDonald.

"—— of a country?" echoed the old man in profound surprize.

"I put up at your place last night," McDonald changed the subject so as not to offend and cheat himself out of a night's lodging.

"My name's Stone," said the other hospitably. "Kind of a hard name, ain't it?"

"Pretty rocky!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" cackled Stone. "But they call me Sandy."

"Sandy Stone—Sandstone—"

McDonald wanted to get away from this matter of names. A deserter usually does.

"What's stirring down below?"

"Whew! Gold hunters. Reg'lar Cripple Creek. Rush. Whole land's plastered with 'em. Soldiers and bums and merchants from stores, and ranchmen from all over the Big Bend, and truck drivers from the Army. They say they's two Army trucks abandoned over on the road above Shafter. And the soldiers has got mescal! I lived at Fo't Stockton fo' years—come theah from Arkingsaw—and I ain't never hyeard of nothing like this befo'."

It was plain Sandy was a natural born talker. He gasped for breath and went on:

"These loud-talkin' galoots is going to have all the fur game scared out o' these mountains in no time. That's my business, trappin' fo' fur. Howsomever I collect on scelps too. Been trappin' three year, starting four, and Davy Crockett hisself couldn't show me many tricks! Considerin' the shortage of game. Whoever started the gold rush sho' started something."

McDonald felt an absurd desire to say that he had started it. He wanted to boast, cry out like a braggart, crow, at the news of the inhabitants of the thirty-thousand square miles pouring out in the rush that his act had started—as he assumed. What a revenge on the accursed country! He hoped there wasn't any gold, so these men and the soldiers would be sold, completely sold, so that they would curse the country with lurid oaths. So the country would be made the butt of jokes.

He wanted to tell how he had started the stampede by sending a Mex into Mariposa

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with gold and a note. Abandoned trucks! Abandoned Cornelius too! If he could only wipe out the whole blasted Army too, the heel-clickers, the flunkeys, saluting, working for next to nothing in the way of pay, glad of a dollar to spend; wished he could brush the country off the earth with its emptiness, and silence, and mysteries.

The natural-born talker got a handful of corn for the chickens and let the pony drink at the trough. Then he spoke again:

"By Henry, reckon some folks'd wonder why I got my perch way up hyear. That's why, Mr. Sojer."

He waved an arm to take in the corner of the world from south to west. It lay under the colors of sunset as peaceful as a little child in its crib, with coverlets of purple and lavender and deep blue, and gold trimmings from the sun, with a cold, sweet breeze bringing the southern perfume.

"She's got anything beat," allowed the apostle, "that I ever rested my gaze on from heah back'ards to Arkingsaw, and 'twixt and between."

All at once he changed his attention, his thought. He forgot the pony and the soldier and walked forward a little way until he was clear of the trees. McDonald followed, caught up by the man's preoccupation. At the edge of the shelf, where the crooked cedar clung to the brink like a crawling cat, he pointed into the southwest.

"They was three of 'em last night at this time."

"Three what?"

"Pillars of smoke."

McDonald saw them then, and he knew they were where the fires had been the night before.

"You think they are signals, don't you?" asked the old boy.

"Signals? Signals for what?"

"Yes, for what? You're a sojer."

They gazed in silence. As the sunset swept away, leaving darkness across the land where the smoke ascended, fires became dimly visible, but this time there were only two.

"What do they mean?" persisted McDonald, uneasy. "The only thing in this country is some kind of a puzzle a white man don't understand."

"Might mean days—two days from now, or two nights," informed the old boy. "Let's go and cook us up some fodder, mister, and figger the thing out."

THE old boy, Sandy, as he insisted he should be called, flitted about like a wood-wren at the getting of supper. And talk—his high-pitched voice never stopped. Under the insistence of it, as under the beat of a steady rain on a low roof, McDonald kept thinking of his getaway, kept trying to frame a question that would get him on the track of the trail out to the railroad. And finally an idea came how to conceal his purpose, and he broke into the downpour:

"Supplies," said he. "Suppose a fellow wanted to get out to the railroad for supplies. How'd he strike out from here?"

"Airyplane'd be the directest and quickest. He-he-he! But seein' you didn't bring yours, you'd go down the mountain west, down my trail a ways, then you'd follow across the foot-hills, or lower slopes, no'ath till you get to the corner of the range, then you'd hit out the way you want. Or else, you'd go down past where the sojers is camped, and take the levler country for it. The first," he added pridefully, "is the way I've worked out as the pathfinder of the Chisos."

"And going from the mountains to the railroad—fellow could stop at ranches to eat?"

"By Henry, boy, you don't know much about this country. You'd be strikin' a lot to strike even two ranches, in any straight-away course, and luckier still to find anybody home, because the whole country is down heah in my neighborhood."

So the way was clear! He'd got his information easily. An elation began to mount in him. Freedom. To shake the dust of the country from his soles.

"Must be fifty men—c'viliams, as you call 'em, down heah," went on Sandy. "And I calculate they's thirty sojers."

McDonald estimated rapidly that this was half of Cornelius' real fighting force. The others that went to make up about one hundred were in the corps, and at headquarters.

"Sojers camped down close to the end o' my trail," went on the old boy in his high tones, "where they's a spring o' sweet water. The c'viliams is mo' independent and has scattered out in three camps, er maybe more.

"But, by Henry, boy, what's doing down there won't be a gnat's breakfast compared to what'll be theah, let this go on two three

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days more. They'll be an army of them coming. Merchants, and bums and bankers, and all sorts o' men, and women too, a-spreading themselves over the face of the country. They'll be streamin' down heah like—like—why, the S. P. railroad's going to look like a clothesline with these folks a dripping from it and splashing on these mounts. Trains will be abandoned at every sidetrack. Wait three-four days to go north for your supplies, boy, and you'll meet 'em trekking across the flats thick as Babylonian captives. Oh, boy, she'll be a sight for young eyes!"

The old man had painted a thrilling picture, stopping to gesture with a three-tined fork. It stirred up McDonald's sense of personal victory to the blazing. He could not refrain from boasting.

"The fellow that started that started something, hey, old boy?" he demanded.

"Wa'ant no one man started that."

"Wasn't there!"

"No sir, they didn't! Nothing short of evil itself could do such a monstrous piece of work."

"No?"

There was a look in the soldier's eye that brought the old man to a sharp pose.

"What you mean?" he sang out, shrill as a bird.

"I started it!"

"You did! If you wa'n't a stranger in my house, boy, I'd call you a liar and take a licking."

"Why you old fool," exploded McDonald, getting to his feet, all worked up. "I can prove it."

"Prove it?"

"Down there with the soldiers I guess you heard about the water-bag lumpy with gold that a Mex took into Mariposa."

"Yep?" wonderingly.

"I'm the guy that sent the Mex in!"

"You—are?"

"I sure am. And it's about breaking me even with this forsaken empty land."

"Empty!" shrilled the old man, more moved by this than the deed of McDonald. "Why—it's full—of views, and sun, and—God."

McDonald roared with ribald laughter.

"You don't like our country, sir," said Sandy stiffly.

"Like it! I should say not! Why—" and he flung caution to the winds—"I, Jasper McDonald, deserted the Army to get out from under the bearing-down pressure of this emptiness, away from the lookin' eyes o' the floating buzzards, back to the land where there's sounds to touch a man's ears, where there's life, and where the cedar-trees don't hug the rocks and crawl!"

The old man stared wide-eyed, and when he could say anything he said sadly:

"Deserter? Boy, I'm sorry to hear that."

"You'll turn me in to salve your conscience, eh? And collect the fifty dollars at the same time. You will like ——!"

McDonald whipped out his gun. He'd talked himself into half a frenzy. The old boy did not make even a motion of being alarmed. He got the meal on the table and let McDonald's play run itself out in awkwardness. McDonald, a little ashamed, put his gun back.

"Drag up yo' box, boy, and go to stowin' the fodder," invited the host presently, as if nothing had risen between them. "No, lad, I wouldn't turn ye in. That wouldn't do you any good down inside. You got to wash that out yo' own self. I never seen a feller before that didn't like something about this country. So your name's McDonald?"

"Who said so?" McDonald evaded, knowing he had betrayed himself.

"You did, boy, in your wild talk. Reckon maybe the boys, your comrades, call you Mac, eh?"

"No, they don't," confessed McDonald sullenly, for there was a commanding something about the old boy that brought out answers.

"Huh, reckon that explains a lot. Don't like the people, don't like the country. And if the people don't like you and call you Mac it's almost bound to be 'cause you didn't like them afore they didn't like you."

There was silence for a long time, but McDonald did some thinking.

"That Mex that took the gold into the garrison—where'd you first see him?" asked Stone.

McDonald narrated the facts of the meeting, and told how he took the peon back and sent him in with the note and the gold.

"Ummm," mused the old man. "Theah's another funny thing. Maybe you can tell, being a sojer yourself. The sojers down below, they are all bunched together. They stick like bees. The mescal don't explain it, for they didn't get that stuff till this afternoon."

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McDonald shook his head. He didn't know and cared less, for in a few more hours he would be away from the soldiers and their affairs.

"They've got a paper," said Sandy. "I——"

He raked around in his pockets until he brought out a soiled square of ruled "pen and ink" paper. McDonald plucked it out of his hands, flicked it open—a map like his own and the one in the saddle-bag!

"The soldiers got one like that," said Sandy. "I seen it. They flock around like it was a valuable pelt.

"Where'd you get it?" demanded McDonald, tapping the one on the table.

"Mex, three-four days ago. I was galvinating around down below. Cookin' me a cottontail rajjit fo' supper, when up walks a Mex. He had a cut-down gunny-sack full o' gold nuggets, and this paper, that he 'peared to think the world and all of. But next morning when he was gone I found it layin' by my pack, where he'd a had to put it. Fact is, he left it, and I ask you, what is it?"

"What is it?"

"I—ain't much on reading. Never went to school."

"It's a map, map of the Chisos Mountains, and the red circle says gold is here somewhere—the old Indian trail and a rock with a map scratched on it. But great guns, man, wasn't you interested in where the Mex got his gold?"

"Sure, but he wouldn't tell. And I've skimmed these mountains. No gold in 'em, I bet. You said Indian trail and a scratched rock? There is something of that tally down below here, half a mile where the sojers are. Show you in the morning."

"In the morning!" McDonald was up and raring to go, in the hot and cold fashion he'd had about the gold all through.

"Keep yo' shirt on," advised the old boy. "It's the likeliest looking place in the Chisos for gold, but nary a glint there. I've wore out a dozen patchings on my knees crawling around looking."

McDonald told briefly how he had come into possession of his map—how the same Mexican, evidently, with a cut-down gunny-sack had left the map in his possession and run. Sandy listened thoughtfully. McDonald spread his map out beside the other.

"There are two," said he. "You say the soldiers have one. I saw another one in a boy's saddle-bags. Four."

"Boy's? By Henry, that explains something I didn't savvy, down below today. A boy rid up on a gant horse——"

"That's him."

"—and called out three men, and they got their heads together behind a boulder, so's I couldn't make out much. And they called out three fo' mo', and the whole bunch allowed they'd pull out and make 'em a new campin' place. They scattered out, two and two. You know what they was doing? Hunting for that trail and that scratched rock."

"Hunting for them? Wouldn't these ranchmen know right where to find it? The trail, anyhow?"

"Huh! Boy, these ranchmen and floaters and town men down heah don't know nothing about these mountains. Ain't four in the Big Bend, I 'low, that's ever even started to explore around. Trail, they've heard of it, that's all."

The old man cackled his contempt.

"They'll find it, howsomever," he added. "Give 'em time."

"But where did the gold come from?" asked McDonald.

"Don't know," said Sandy shortly.

They sat a long time, each wrapped in his own thoughts. Once Sandy replenished the fire and afterward sat tapping slowly and regularly the side of the thin stove with a charred wooden poker. It was he who broke the silence with his high voice stabbing into it.

"Been thinking."

"So have I—about the northern wheat-fields."

"Been thinking about four maps," went on the old man somberly. "About three fires over in Mexico last night, and two tonight. Been thinking about most of the citizens and soldiers being gathered here in the mountains, away from their business and homes."

McDonald grinned.

"And now I've thought of something else," went on Sandy. "This afternoon a Mex brought in two big jugs of mescal on a burro. He tried to sell it to the soldiers, but they took it away from him. He didn't care. He got on the burro hisself and rode away contented.

"*And that Mex is the only Mex I've seen around here.* What do you think about that?"

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"Wise Mexicans!"

Sandy snorted. He went outside for a look-see, and came back to report that the two fires in Mexico were burning brightly.

"By Henry," he observed between grunts as he dragged his tight boots off, "it's sho' a ripe time fo' the Mexes to pull a raid. Every store and ranch, might' nigh, in the Big Bend is setting there alone waiting for 'em."

IT WAS early in the morning when McDonald started on his ride designed to get him to the railroad. He was exultant inside, sullen outside. Ostensibly he was going with Sandy to take a look at the old trail and the stone. He wasn't letting his left hand know what his right was doing, but at the proper moment, when he should have his course located, he would ride away from his host and hit north.

Sandy rode down the hill with a thoughtful grimness over him. They scarcely spoke until the old man called attention that they were riding on what he considered the old trail, whether or not it was the Great Trail. He pointed out its curvings to get around the head of a gulch and to make easy grades over the hog-backs.

"Tenderfoot'd pass it up twenty times," he said, "and never see it. But they's enough of a dent yet for your eye to foller if ye look hard.

"And there," he went on, pointing to the face of a boulder just above the ancient road, "is the cat scratchin's on the rock."

Along the lower third of a flat space the size of the wall of a small bedroom were curving and criss-cross lines, vague in intent, yet assuredly meant for the depiction of a trail system. The deepest scratch was evidently meant for the main stem, and it showed such curves as naturally would exist to get it around cañons and mountains.

"Map," pondered Sandy, looking at it curiously. "Too deep for me."

They ascended the slope and got around to the top of the rock. In its flat surface were a half-dozen *molinos*—mills—or mortars, round holes that would have held a hatful of shelled corn, ground into the solid stone through years of grinding corn with a stone pestle. In two of the mortars the pestles still remained, heavy clubs of stone worn smooth along the handle end by the palms of innumerable squaws.

"Nothing there," asserted Sandy, pointing down hill to a flat acre or two of loose wash stone. "Most likely looking place in the mountains for gold. If the Mexes had a scheme they picked mighty good, fo' this locality can engage the attention of a gold-rush for a week. But I fine-tooth combed her, and they ain't no gold.

"But great Henry!" he exclaimed, the romance of the ancient trail taking hold of him, "just think o' the stalking braves that have passed this rock. Ain't that pay enough? Old squaws, and younger women with babes on their backs in some sort o' pokes, and girls with bare feet and twinklin' eyes a-flickerin' at the young bucks—all a-singing and a-chantin' and a-laughing so's you can almost hear 'em off there in the mists o' time.

"Empty country! Boy, it's full o' people. And full o' things. All yo' need is eyes."

He pointed with a sort of affectionate sweep of his arm out over the vastness—and broke abruptly in the act.

"Look!" he admonished. "I'll say she's full o' people—and things."

McDonald squinted and scanned in the direction that Sandy gazed, and in a moment he made out a cloud, a pillar, of dust, far in the southwest, in Mexico, then another, and a third, the sun lighting them up.

"Moving bodies of men," said Sandy. "Twenty-five thirty miles from here. Moving out from their rendyvoo in three lines, like the spreading tines of my cooking fork. They'll strike like rattlers early tonight."

"You mean—?" asked McDonald, looking as if his best friend had swatted him.

"Mexican trick," flung Sandy impatiently. "They've sent spies over with gold nuggets and maps to entice soldiers and ranchmen away from their duty and homes, so's they can ride across the river and help themselves. And the women and the kids are alone too."

"And I," said McDonald, sort of choked, "am the bird that sent the Mex into the garrison and started the whole thing."

"If you didn't, somebody else would."

"But *I* did it!"

"So you've bragged befo'."

"But I ain't bragging now."

McDonald got off the rock and started down the slope toward his horse. Sandy followed, looking after him with some degree of wonder. The soldier looked as if he were about to blow up.

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"What you figgering on?" asked Sandy when they'd got into their saddles.

"Going down and get those soldiers started back to Mariposa. That bunch is about half the fighting force."

"You ain't ridin' no'ath, then, fo'—supplies?"

McDonald flushed. He turned on the old man savagely.

"Yes, ——, I am! I'm riding 'no'ath' this morning—riding out of this *crushing* country to civilization! And I'd like to see any man try to stop me!"

He gripped the protruding butt of his pistol significantly.

THE alcohol of the mescal, as alcohol always does, had treated each soldier differently, according to the status of his mind. They were lying about, or stirring, or gabbing loudly, cursing, and two were to one side retching, while one was at a fire preparing breakfast.

McDonald and Stone took this in while they halted behind a fringe of small oak stuff above the spring.

"Twenty-six of 'em," said the soldier. "One sergeant and two corporals among them. The toughest in the Army!"

It was one of the corporals who was at the fire. He seemed the soberest of the lot, and he was grim and worked with an air of determination. He kept close to a big jug.

As the two men sized up the situation, a loud talking half-dozen some distance away, came forward. They were headed by a huge, loose-jointed, close-cropped, young fellow, the most reckless and rebellious among the men of Mariposa. He carried a revolver, and he went bellowing toward the corporal at the fire.

"Hey, you!" he roared. "Whadda ya think you can get away with around here? We're going to have that jug, savvy?"

The corporal, whose name was Blake, was not armed. There seemed to be almost no firearms in the camp, as if the soldiers, in getting away from the post, had not been able to get their guns. But Blake faced the others grimly.

"Nothing doing!" he called out. "There's going to be no more boozing in this outfit. We're out here for gold, and we're going after it full force."

"You was drunk yourself last night."

"I ain't drunk now!"

"We're going to have that booze!"

"This stuff's for the poor boobs to sober up on, not get drunker on. Get back with ye. Act like you had some sense."

Mallet, the huge loose-bodied one, laughed out contemptuously and started forward, the gun held threateningly.

McDonald saw that force was necessary. To get the men started back to the defense of the garrison, of the town and the ranches would be hard enough without letting them renew the intoxication of the night before. He had seen a foreman quell rebellion in a threshing-crew in Manitoba once by quick and decisive action. He had held in mind that if he had ever to act, he would act quickly also. He acted now.

He sent a heavy bullet from his Army pistol crashing into the jug, at forty yards. And the jug was a wreck. The bullet went whanging into space.

All heads jerked around to see who had fired. McDonald rode down from the oak fringe and the rocks, Sandy behind him.

"Oh-ho!" bellowed Mallet. "Here's a real deserter! Where you been, McDonald? —— you, you've spoilt our fun!"

"Has the—hic—ol' fel' led you to gol'?" some one asked drunkenly.

"You fool, you spilt the booze!"

"Listen here, you birds," McDonald waded in. "You've got to get back to the post and get there quick."

They greeted this with bitter looks, and scorn, and laughter.

"There's some of us ain't going back at all," said Mallet. "We've quit for good. Get our pockets full o' gold, hang the Army!"

"But there's a raid coming—Mexican raid."

"Always raids coming," a voice said, and the whole crowd laughed.

McDonald understood that attitude. He'd said the same to Captain Cornelius, he remembered. Sober, they would scarcely be convinced; drunk, in a mocking or fighting mood, with gold to be hunted, they would never be convinced. He hadn't the courage to try to convince them by speaking of the many maps, and of the absence of Mexicans. They would hoot him. In other words, this was the portion of the Mariposa garrison that, already sick of the country, was ready, drunk, to do anything, regardless of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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It was a hard minute for McDonald. But after all he didn't falter.

"You men," he said mildly, "take notice! I got you covered. You even look like you want to shoot, I'll plug you! Mallet, don't move! Loose your fingers on that gun Let 'er drop!"

The gun thudded on the ground. They had mistrusted McDonald's dourness before. The lesson of the jug was before their eyes. They were afraid of him now.

"Get your hands over your heads, all of you!" McDonald barked. "About face!"

Hands ascended. They about faced as if at drill, so that their backs were to their persecutor.

"Now, you, Sandy, go and get their guns. They ain't a dozen."

In five minutes six guns, with belts and ammunition, lay at McDonald's feet—five pistols and a Springfield rifle.

"All of 'em," declared Sandy. "They ain't got nothing hid, either, in the bag o' their shirts or otherwise."

"Fine. Sack 'em up and put 'em behind my saddle."

McDonald was feeling elation again. He had never had men crimped like this before.

"You men," he said, "go and saddle and get ready to move. Sandy, watch their saddles and bags for guns! You toads make a hop I'll crack down on you. See me, I've got the rifle. If you try to run I'll pick you off!"

They faced him, dropping their hands raggedly.

"Aw, what you trying to do?" bellowed Mallet. "Take us in and make yourself strong with old Corney? Crawl out on our shoulders?"

McDonald's answer was a quick shot with his pistol. The bullet took Mallet's peaked campaign hat by the summit and snatched it off from where it sat high on his head.

"Aw, thunder, Mac," said Mallet meekly.

Their horses were half-circled around the open space that had been beat out in times past because of the spring. One hour was spent in getting the sick men and the half-drunks, into the saddle and in watering the horses. McDonald had them fall in in a column of twos.

"You," he said to Sandy, "had better go and try to convince the civilians that they're wanted at home. I'll get these babies where they belong."

"I'll bet a dollar you do!" answered Sandy. "I'll 'tend to the others."

And Mac, as every man in the ranks had managed to call him by this time, gave the order to march.

He rode in the rear, rifle ready, watchful, warning that he'd shoot without thinking.

THE day, down in the flats, was hot. Dust rose so thickly that sometimes McDonald had to squint and peer to see the head of the column, for there was not the faintest breeze to move the dust aside. It was such a day again as earlier in the week when McDonald first ran amuck. He rode grimly, watchful, his gun never unready. Once in a while some man fell back close enough to talk, calling him Mac always. It was close to four o'clock in the afternoon, yet no man had had more to drink than what water had been in a few canteens at the start. Nor had the horses drunk or rested. It had become a weary parade.

Off down across the flat, McDonald saw two soldiers riding together. Double sentries. It meant Cornelius knew something was in the wind.

Unexpectedly Corporal Blake called back, and there was a stir among the half-hearted riders.

"Hey, Mac, look ahead!"

Ahead, at a turn in the road, sat Captain Cornelius on his horse.

"Attention!" ordered McDonald.

The men jerked themselves upright in their saddles. They went past their captain like good boys, military as the book, eyes front and unwavering. When McDonald came up he saluted, as is proper for the leader of a unit to his commander. And Cornelius dropped in alongside. There were many things he could have said, but he waited for McDonald to speak first. And Mac did.

"Figgered the Mexes were coming over," he said.

"They were, but with you boys we'll have enough to bluff 'em out, maybe."

They rode on, the captain studying Mac.

"What's the real reason," the officer asked at last, "for you coming back?"

Mac flushed. He couldn't bring himself to say the women and children around over the country. It would sound sort o' nutty, so he gave another answer that sounded about as reasonable.

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"This country—it's always settin' on buzzard eggs and hatching out ——. Thought if we got back here quick enough we could beat it at its own game once."

"Mmmm," mused Cornelius, hiding a twinkle in his eyes. "Bring your men to a gallop, sergeant, we've got no time to lose. Good thing one of the lookouts saw you coming, hour or so ago."

McDonald gave the command, and as the drooping column swung to the task, he turned to his officer in surprize.

"You said—sergeant, sir."

"Well?"

McDonald had done some hard thinking as he rode in behind the men. He realized he hadn't been a man up to the hilt. He wanted to play square now.

"But I'm the fellow," he said, "that sent the Mexican in with the gold that started the men to leaving."

"And you're the man that brought 'em back, too. And there'll be a vacancy among the sergeants over this."

"I'd—hate to see 'em punished, captain. I'm to blame."

"Oh, you'll get yours. All of you will. Reprimand. Guess that's enough. Know how you all felt. Was tempted to go hunting for gold myself. But the two corporals and the sergeant lose their chevrons."

"But I—deserted."

"Come back, hav'n't you? Guess you'll go ahead and make that first-class soldier now."

"Why—why you doing this, captain?"

"Did you ever read the story of the prodigal son?"

"No."

"Read it, then."

The galloping, the rattle of accouterments, made talking difficult. The two began to fall back. When they were clear of noise and dust, McDonald spoke again.

"Figured on going to prison and getting out of this country," he said.

"But you'll stick now, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll stick now."

He rode close to the captain and spoke as man to man.

"But, Lord, captain, won't it be a great day when——"

He paused to gesture in an unspoken disdain around the hot and empty land.

"Won't it be a red-letter day when the orders come for us to transfer out of this to some God's country!"

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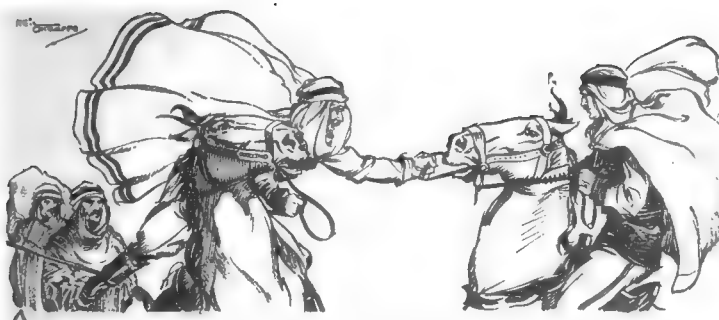

# The Hand of Friendship

## An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

by GEORGE E. HOLT

*Author of "Mohamed Ali and the Father of Donkeys," "A Transaction in Heads," etc.*

SIR MORTIMER JONES, K. C. M. G., etc., His Britannic Majesty's Minister to the Shareefian Court of Morocco, was on his way to Fez to take up certain matters personally with the Sultan. As this was in the days when France and Germany were fighting each other desperately—but without guns—for domination in the affairs of the troubled Moorish Empire, and England was hard put to it to keep sufficient of a fast-waning popularity to enable it to swap its Moroccan "interests" with France for a free hand in Egypt, these matters were important. Not to be left to the semi-diplomatic power of the British Consul at the capital, but demanding an expensive six weeks' journeying of the *bashador* himself. Expensive, for in those days a *bashador* traveled in awful dignity—no less—somewhat as Jove probably moved about in the Olympian days, his thunderous footsteps echoing among the hills.

Modern times brought new Joves, and new echoes—echoes in the foreign offices of European nations. It was a long journey, because Fez lies nearly two hundred miles south of Tangier, where the Joves resided, and travel was by caravan—luxurious caravan, which must not make more than ten miles a day, lest the *bashador* appear impetuous and anxious in the eyes of the Sultan. And of course such a caravan demanded an impressive personnel, including a score of Moorish soldiers, not so much to guard the sacred person of Jove, as to add to the thunders of his footsteps—and to draw down a substantial remuneration in wages, gifts and bakshish. Of these guards, one Kaid Tahar was captain.

Now, the footsteps of Sir Mortimer had reverberated as far as a spot called by the natives M'zora, or The Peg. Because there, in times of which there is not even local legend, a great circle of huge pillars, like those at Stonehenge, had been built. Only one remained—and there has been only one for so many centuries that it gives its name to the place. Near by was a straw-roofed village, surrounded by a protecting hedge of giant cactus—a very small and unostentatious village, but noteworthy because of the fact that it was the only one near the Tangier-Fez trail which was quite openly anti-foreign. I remember camping at The Peg one eventful night—but that is still another tale.

However, *bashadorial* caravans have nothing to fear from anti-foreign villages: even an intelligent Moor who is thoroughly aware that his country is being betrayed and exploited and seized has *some* sense. But it was here that certain things happened which concerned the *bashador*, the *bashador's* daughter, who likewise was going

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to observe the manners of the royal Court of the *shareefs*, and a number of other people.

If English girls were ever beautiful, Edythe Ethelwynn Jones might have qualified. As it is, she was very, very pretty, with eyes and a complexion and spun-gold hair and a lovely disposition. (Therefore I was wrong: she undoubtedly *was* beautiful in the eyes of many.) That, I think, is quite all that one needs to know about any girl. Except that she was a good sportsman. Wherefore, as a matter of fact, this story.

ON THE morning of the day these things began to happen, Edythe went for a little ride towards the village, followed by her favorite collie—who likewise was going to Fez to observe the customs of his kind in court circles. She did not ride far, because she had instructions, which were that she must not go out of sight of the guard at the camp, in case she refused, as she did, to take the guard with her.

Reaching a somewhat distant point, she was about to turn back, when the collie saw a hare and started to make its acquaintance. Calling in vain, Edythe rode after him, toward the village. As hare and collie raced toward the cactus hedge a native rode forth, raised a gun, and fired at the dog.

As I have said, Edythe was a real sportsman—with the result that she stuck spurs to her horse and sped after the native, who was now pursuing the dog, his bullets causing little spurts of yellow dust here and there in the vicinity of the collie. The hare had got to hiding, but the dog, puzzled and frightened by the thundering hoofs of the horse and the gun shots, kept going, farther and farther from the camp. Behind him rode the Moor, and behind the Moor, seeing red in spite of her sex, rode Edythe.

But suddenly the Moor reined in, waited for the girl to reach him, grinningly took two slashes from her riding-crop across his shoulders, and then dragged her from her own horse to his saddle and galloped off. An hour later she was hidden in a tiny village a dozen miles distant—and the *bashador's* caravan was the most upset thing in Morocco—except its politics.

Now, while these things were taking place in the vicinity of M'zora, Mohamed Ali, with a price upon his head, lay in pleasant hiding among the Anghera hills. All news came to him quickly: hence before sunset the brother of a soldier with the *bashador's* caravan stood before him and asked permission to tell of matters which seemed interesting. But scarcely had he begun his tale, when Mohamed Ali became very deeply concerned. For the reason that, as I have told elsewhere, when upon an occasion he had daringly come out of hiding to carry the sick child of one of his followers to Tangier for treatment by the English medical missionaries, Sir Mortimer had come upon him, but had permitted him to go his way in peace.

"He is a man," Mohamed Ali had said of Sir Mortimer then; "and by the Name of the Prophet, I shall return his favor as soon as Allah shall permit."

Thus it was not pleasant to him to know that evil had fallen upon the *bashador*, and as the story was unfolded his anger grew, until it was a very big anger indeed. Mohamed Ali was a big man, and he was angry from the soles of his slippers to the top of his red fez.

"Who—" he growled, striding restlessly—"who was the son of unnumbered dogs who carried off the girl?"

"That I know not. He was not of the village of M'zora. A chance rider, the villagers swear, of whom they know nothing and never had seen before."

Mohamed Ali brought up short.

"And—do *you* believe that?" he asked.

His informant nodded.

"It seems true," he answered. "It would be childish of M'zora to do such a thing."

"They would never think of it," observed Mohamed Ali. "They are fools. But—there is a strange smell in my nose. *I* do not think that if *I* were riding casually along the Fez road, and should see a *bashador's* daughter, that *I* should instantly conceive and carry out the scheme of seizing her and carrying her off—alone—by myself—to—where?"

"That I do not know. To the west they went. Beyond M'zora village."

"To the west. To Ber Reyan, perhaps. But he—whoever he was—knew that he could do so. *La, la, la!* This matter was planned ahead. That rider, I think, was awaiting his opportunity. And so—let us see."

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For a moment he walked about swiftly, muttering to himself.

"Allah is very wise: He gave every effect a cause. To find the cause of a thing we must proceed from the known to the unknown—and then find that. Now, having observed the effect— Who is in the caravan of the *bashador?* Name them."

The fellow named a dozen, counting them off on his fingers, before Mohamed Ali stopped him, a gleam in his eyes and a smile twisting his lips whimsically.

"Enough—enough! Now may I return the favor of the infidel—who to my mind is no infidel at all, in spite of his beliefs. To Ber Reyan we go."

He smiled slowly, as pictures in his head showed the path for his feet to follow. No longer Mohamed Ali, outlaw, but Mohamed Ali, "Eagle of the Angheras," in pursuit of his prey.

"Now we move," he continued. "Speedily—lest the girl come to harm. Tell Mustapha, the headman, to mount himself and nine of his men—after they have said their sunset prayer, as I shall now do."

The man withdrew. Mohamed Ali spread his crimson prayer-cloth upon the ground and knelt upon it.

Ten minutes later, as the mists in the valleys began to turn purple, Mohamed Ali led ten other horsemen through the hills and towards the west. Moonrise found them in sight of the village of Ber Reyan. And in another hour—Mohamed Ali's guess having proved correct—many things took place in the village which caused echoes elsewhere. In the camp of the British *bashador*, for example.

IT WAS midnight when Sir Mortimer was hastily awakened from an hour's restless sleep, to be told that an emissary from Mohamed Ali desired speech with him. Now Sir Mortimer had thought of Mohamed Ali *once* in connection with this affair, and had immediately over-ruled the suggestion: Mohamed Ali was not one to use women in his game. Besides which, there was the matter of Mohamed Ali's secret visit to the medical missionaries, when Sir Mortimer had said to himself, concerning Mohamed Ali, words quite similar to those Mohamed Ali had used with respect to the *bashador*. It was therefore with a sickening sensation that he read a message from Mohamed Ali.

"Your daughter is safe," he had written, "and she will be in your camp within two hours if you will come, at once, accompanied only by Kaid Tahar, to the shrine of Mulai Mohamed, two miles due west from The Peg."

For a little space the keen brain of his Majesty's representative weighed the situation. Sir Mortimer was no coward—but he had to be the symbol of King Edward VII before being the father of Edythe Ethelwynn—a fact which it took him ten seconds to forget. Then, to the messenger—

"Tell your master I ride at once."

Very shortly, accompanied by captain of the guards, Kaid Tahar, the *bashador* rode swiftly westward through the moonlight, and halted his horse only when a mounted white figure came from behind a little white shrine and blocked the path.

"Mohamed Ali!" exclaimed the *bashador*—and the rebuke in his voice was clear.

"Mohamed Ali," agreed the white figure, and laughed.

"Mohamed Ali," echoed the voice of Kaid Tahar, and there was fear in it.

The outlaw whistled shrilly, and from behind the shrine came horsemen. With them rode the *bashador's* daughter—and one other.

"Treachery?" asked Sir Mortimer coldly.

"You shall see," replied Mohamed Ali.

He waited until the girl had reached her father's side. Then—

"Now let us get at the causes of this matter."

Raising his voice, he called—

"Step forward—Abdeslam Filali."

As a man with shackled wrists moved out from among the horsemen, Kaid Tahar wheeled his horse swiftly, but not so swiftly as Mohamed Ali struck spurs to his own. With a mighty leap the beast ranged alongside Kaid Tahar's mount, and Mohamed Ali's hands seized the bridle. The *kaid's* hand flew to the pistol at his belt, but stopped there. Mohamed Ali's automatic covered him from the outlaw's hip.

"Be in no haste," said he. "'Every delay has its advantage,'" he quoted. "For some one," he added, improving the proverb. Again he called to the one who had answered to the name of Abdeslam Filali.

"Speak now, plainly, as you agreed when I spared your life in the village of Ber Reyan—misguided tool of a better



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brain. And have no fear of him who gave you orders—he is already harmless. Who employed you to do this shame upon the *bashador* and upon his daughter?"

"Kaid Tahar," said Abdeslam promptly.

"And the reason?"

"That the English might be made angry against the Sultan."

"And for what purpose?"

"The Germans wished it."

"Then Kaid Tahar is a traitor—is a German agent?"

"He is."

"A lie! A lie! All are lies!" shouted Tahar.

"The proof," went on Mohamed Ali, paying no attention.

"A secret pocket in his *shakarah*," said Abdeslam briefly.

"Search," commanded Mohamed Ali.

A dozen willing hands pulled Tahar from his horse, tore his *shakarah*, or leather bag, from about his neck, and ripped it to pieces. One handed a letter to Mohamed Ali. A glance showed that it was proof, even as Abdeslam had said. Without comment he handed it to Sir Mortimer, and turned upon the now shaking Kaid.

"Kaid Tahar!" he cried. "Kaid Dog! Kaid Liar! Kaid Traitor! *Wild-il-haram!* As I have been assured for many months. But—the end is here."

He rode to the side of the now smiling *bashador*.

"Thus you see it was the hand of friendship," he said. "My men will escort you back to your camp. But I desire that Tahar stay with me: he is a traitor—and my enemy."

"He is in my caravan, however," objected the *bashador*—but there was a smile about his lips. "And a *bashador* must protect his servants."

"True," agreed Mohamed Ali. "You must of course protect him—so far as you can."

"That—surely," agreed the *bashador*.

"I must then take him from you by force?" continued Mohamed Ali, now also smiling.

"It is the only way, I fear," assented Sir Mortimer.

"It grieves me to do so—but it is necessary."

He gave a command to his men, and a portion of them moved off to the shrine, dragging Kaid Tahar with them.

"Now all the proprieties are observed," said Mohamed Ali. "But His Majesty at Fez will make inquiries of you."

"Naturally," agreed the *bashador*. "I shall have to tell him that Tahar—er—met with an accident on the journey."

"Which is the truth," said Mohamed Ali. "An accident—which proved fatal."

Sir Mortimer saw the face of Mohamed Ali harden swiftly at the last word, and understood.

"You relieve me of an unpleasant responsibility," he said.

"To me," returned Mohamed Ali, "it will be a pleasure."

He spoke to those of his followers who still sat their horses at a little distance.

"Go you with my friend, the *bashador*, to his camp, and see that no harm befalls him."

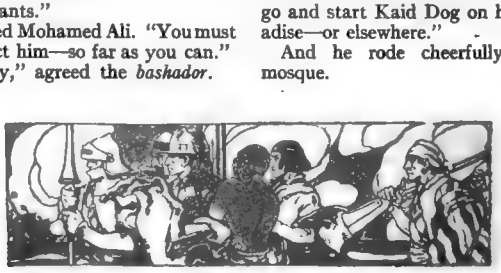
They swung their horses in line and waited.

"*Selaama*, now," said Mohamed Ali to the *bashador*, and tightened rein.

But Sir Mortimer held out his hand, and, after the space of a breath, Mohamed Ali gripped it——

"THAT assuredly was the hand of friendship," observed Mohamed Ali to himself as he watched the party move off. "*Wa hamdulilah*. Now I must go and start Kaid Dog on his way to Paradise—or elsewhere."

And he rode cheerfully towards the mosque.



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# Cassidy *and the* Wild Bunch

## by FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

*Author of "The Forgotten Expedition to Santa Fé," "The Most Consummate Villain," etc.*

"BUTCH" CASSIDY was the name he used when he came to the "wild Bunch." Before that time he was a rough-and-tumble cowboy down in southern Utah, a coarse-grained young rowdy of the saddle with puckered blue eyes which seemed to bore straight into one, and a shock of flaxen hair; one of that big-boned, untidy breed which went about in worn overalls and sweat-stained sombreros, unadorned by colored neckerchiefs or other gaudy trappings of their craft; bow-legged, shabby chewers of tobacco—but in the saddle picturesque beyond description. They say he could ride the meanest horse that ever traded ends while it was pitching.

Bronco-breaking and the clouds of acrid dust in the pole corrals; hard riding in the country of the tinted bluffs which drop away and away like a long flight of gigantic stairs into the depths of blue haze where flows the Colorado; the breathless struggle in the quicksand ford; the long *tête-à-tête* with Death at the crossing when the Summer flood boiled brown from bank to bank; all these were in the day's work. And for playtime there were the cow-towns. Green River knew him and Moab and Vernal; they were all alike; whisky, stud poker, faro and the girls. He started in at sixteen and after three years of it he was getting tough. How does the old song run, the one they used to sing to the cattle on the bed ground?

Oh, once in the saddle I used to go dancing.
Oh, once in the saddle I used to go gay.
First took to drinking and then to card playing——

If you are curious to know how it came about that he rode away from Utah leaving his real name behind him, those lines explain with rare directness. Some member of his craft extemporized them down by the Rio Grande in the days of the first trail herds; and during the next three decades hundreds of others lifted their young voices to the tune; the night wind carried it across wide flats; the gnarled junipers listened to it on the mesas and the cottonwoods beside the lonely rivers, until there was no place in the Rocky Mountain West that did not know the ballad.

Oh, take me to Boot-hill and throw the sod o'er me.
I'm only a cowboy; I know I done wrong.

Of all their songs they liked it best because the theme dealt with a thing that happened to so many of their number; so many of them had ridden away, as this tow-headed young rowdy was riding, to drift from hiding-place to hiding-place with prices on their heads.

The cowboy outlaws are as extinct now

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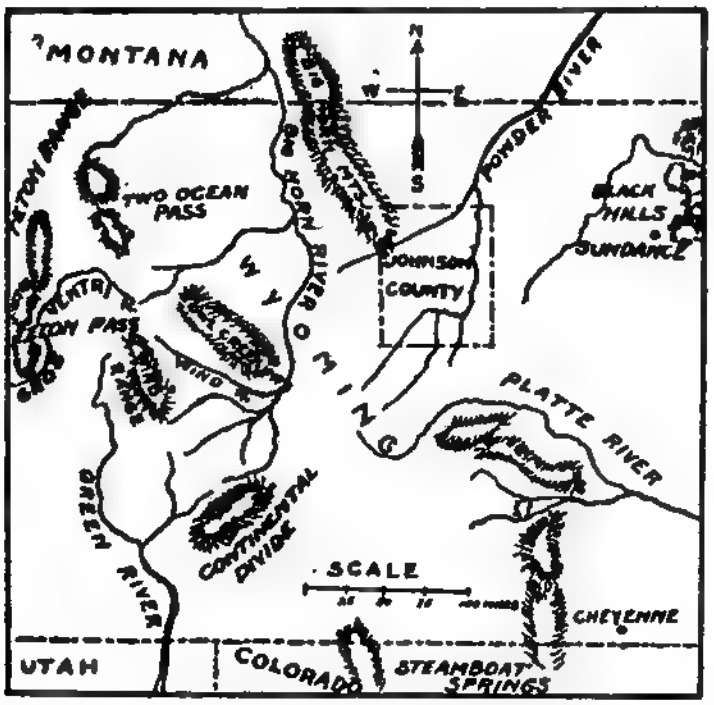
as the bison and the blanket Indians. The conditions which created them can never be repeated, and in this day when those conditions have ceased to exist, it is hard to understand the men who were so often big in their very badness. In the latter half of the eighties, when Cassidy went wrong, the last of the breed worthy of the name were beginning to gather in a loosely organized band which was called "The Wild Bunch."

They came from half a dozen States and Territories; seasoned desperadoes from New Mexico and Texas; horse thieves from Utah and Colorado, stock rustlers from Montana




and Wyoming; youths who had never burned powder save in some cow-town frolic and cold-eyed killers with thousands of dollars in rewards out against them. In that era when the law was beginning to get its first real grip on the sage brush country, they sought sanctuary in the patches of wilderness which still existed: Brown's Park, the Robbers' Roost, the Hole-in-the-Wall and the Lost Cabin Country. The bigger men among them became acquainted with one another; they learned the different rendezvous, the places where a fugitive could get fresh horses and information.

So the outlaw trail was established between the Little Rockies in Montana and the upper reaches of the Animas Valley in New Mexico.

These were the conditions when Cassidy turned his back on the law and left his real name behind him. At just about that time a small, dark-featured cowboy who had come to Montana with a trail herd from Texas, got into trouble in the hamlet of Landusky by the Musselshell. Old "Pike" Landusky, who was quite a figure in the country, made the mistake of calling him a nigger because of his swarthy complexion, and paid for it with his life.

Those who claim to know say that it was a fair fight, but the friends of the dead man were in control of the county offices at the time, and so the slayer left the country. He took the name of Harvey Logan. He and his brother Lonny drifted down into eastern Wyoming where they met Harry Lonabaugh, who had just begun to do well stealing horses. In time Butch Cassidy fell in with them.

These three, Cassidy, Lonabaugh and Harvey Logan, became the leaders of the Wild Bunch. Among its members were Bob Leigh, "Camella" Hanks, "Flat-Nosed" George, Bob Kilpatrick and Ben Carver. There were perhaps as many as a dozen others at different times, but they were lesser lights who drifted away and vanished early in the game.

From now on this is the story of Butch Cassidy as the old-timers tell it, the men who got brief glimpses of him while he was riding hither and thither along the unmarked route which was called "The Outlaw Trail." A series of pictures; that is all it is; that is all that any man has of him; and there are many gaps which you must let your imagination fill in for you. Because their lives were interwoven with his—and because of what finally came to him in company with Lonabaugh—these other men and some of their deeds will find places in the narrative.

WIND RIVER knew him in the Fall of 1889. He came into this part of Wyoming with a shallow-eyed young specimen of the breed who were to be found dealing stud in every cow-town or tending bar or doing anything to make money—excepting hard work. "Al" Hainer was the partner's name. They bought the Charley Peterson place on Horse Creek—the town of Dubois stands near the spot today—and they had it fenced before snow flew. Some time later they brought in a band of horses.

The Winter of 1889-90 was memorable because Christmas made its first appearance on the upper Wind River. Heretofore those who kept track of such small details as

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dates had crossed off the twenty-fifth of December on their patent medicine calendars and let it go at that. But this year the populace—there were some twenty odd of them within an area of about one thousand square miles of sage-brush flats and rolling hills and red-flanked mountains—saddled up to ride to Simpson's place. For Mrs. Simpson, who was the first white woman in the country, had lived long enough in the West to know how much a man may miss some things of which he rarely speaks; and so she had sent out word for every one to come to her home for Christmas dinner.

Before the morning was half-over the guests were arriving. They were visible from afar, black dots moving across the white expanse until the forms of ponies and riders became distinct; then the jingle of bitt-chains, the soft scuffle of hoofs in the snow; voices down by the barn and, within a few moments, the newcomers had joined the watchers at the frost-rimed windows in the sitting-room.

"Here comes Curt and 'Shorty' from the Circle Bar."

And:

"There's the Swede from Dry Crick. Must o' crossed the divide before sunup."

So the announcements went one after another, with monosyllabic greetings to the arrivals and perhaps a stealthy grin between old friends who had not seen one another since last Summer in Lander. There were long intervals during which conversation went on in subdued undertones. Along toward noon some one said—

"Them's the two that's got the Peterson place."

"I seen the white-haired one in Lander last September," another proclaimed; "Cassidy's his name."

Comment and question became general:

"That's the fellow I was tellin' you about, the one that forked that outlaw over at Fort Washakie."

"He sure can ride. I heard it from the storekeeper."

"Who's his partner? The one with the yeller hankerchief an' the fancy boots."

"Oh him—*I* dunno. Mormon from down Vernal way som'ers."

The constraint which had been hanging over them in this pleasant sitting-room passed with the arrival of the pair from Horse Creek. It can not be said that anyone brightened up at the sight of Al Hainer, but Cassidy brought the spirit of frolic with him. Before dinner was on the table those who had grinned in silence were beginning to laugh aloud. The children hovered close about him.

In the afternoon there was an egg-nogg; and then they had games. There are old-timers who tell to this day how the cowboys of Wind River roared and the children shrieked with mirth; and how Butch Cassidy set the pace, with his tow-colored hair in wild disorder and his puckered blue eyes blazing.

Young Jim Simpson, who was barely turned sixteen, saw him that Christmas day and straightway rendered unto him a boy's full-hearted worship. Later in the season young Jim went forth to ride for the first time in the Winter round-up and saw much more of him. In those weeks of work upon the wind-swept ranges Butch Cassidy became his hero.

It was the year of the first influenza epidemic—the grippe they called it then—and there was a period when all the cowboys in the camp were taken down, save Cassidy who used to saddle up once a week and ride fifty miles to Simpson's.

"Dr. Cassidy," he always announced himself, "come to report on my patients and get some more medicine."

Then he would sit beside the stove and have a bite to eat and a talk with Mrs. Simpson. There was an ingenuousness about him which warmed her heart toward him and for years afterward she implicitly believed the story that he told her on one of these midwinter visits, of his parents and their home in New York City—which was about two thousand miles from the truth.

The months went by. Spring came and by the time the grass grew strong the pair at the Peterson place had disposed of their horses by sale and barter to stockmen of the neighborhood. One day they rode away, and Wind River saw no more of them.

THE next Fall they showed up in Lander. The old cow-town was enjoying its youth then, ready to meet a man half-way in fight or frolic. Cassidy slapped it on the back, so to speak, and was taken into high favor. Now and again he and his partner took advantage of an opportunity to bank one of the faro or monte snaps which were usually taken by the regular gamblers.

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They always had plenty of money; it was generally understood that they had made it trading horses; and some spoke of having seen them in the Lost Cabin country.

Those were the days of open gambling and open drinking, when there were at least one or two faro layouts in almost every saloon; when every bar was ornamented with at least one pair of polished steer horns and the front of every bar was adorned, at every hour of the twenty-four, with anywhere from one to a dozen of Lander's leading citizens.

It did not matter who you were or where you came from; but it did matter how you comported yourself. The unwritten code varied somewhat from any we know nowadays. When Cassidy and several exuberant fellow spirits hitched four unbroken broncos to the old overland stage coach, filled the inside with rouged women and, having disposed themselves on top wherever there was room to hang, let her go reeling down the main street to the banging of their six-shooters and the shrieking of the female passengers, Lander was startled. But Lander was not shocked.

Nor can it be said that Lander was deeply shocked when the dénouement came in the Spring of 1892. The two partners had left the town early in the Winter. By the time the snow began to melt the news began to filter out; and when the grass was strong Bob Calverly, deputy sheriff of Frémont County, came back from a long absence. With him he brought a band of Padlock horses, which had been missing from their range in the Owl Creek Mountains ever since last Fall, and two prisoners, Cassidy was one and Al Hainer was the other.

Most of the details came out before the trial was over. W. A. Richards, the president of the Wyoming Stockgrowers Association, and Sheriff John Ward of Frémont County had been working together for some time to break up a band of big horse-thieves who had been plundering through this part of the State. Bob Calverly had followed the trail of sixty ponies down past Green River, and westward through the desert to a lonely cabin near Hames Fork in the southeastern corner of Wyoming. With him he had a companion who had taken Hainer easily enough. That did not surprize Lander.

Nor was Lander at all surprized to learn that Bob Calverly had creased Cassidy along the top of the head with a shot from his forty-five revolver and broken his jaw with the six-shooter before he was able to arrest him. It has been said that Lander was not shocked at the dénouement; those were rough days and the average man was used to all sorts of companions; there was many a good citizen who cherished a sneaking regard for the prisoner because of that fight. And, when it comes to that, Bob Calverly and Sheriff John Ward did not think any the less of him for it either.

The case was tried in July. Hainer was acquitted and from now on he comes no more into this story. Cassidy's lawyer had a fine alibi, a bill of sale from a Nebraska man for the horses which were mentioned in the indictment. But when the attorney was about to produce the document and show it to the jury, a court attaché came to his side.

"See that big man in the middle of the fourth row?" the official whispered and when the lawyer nodded he went on: "Well he's the fellow whose name is signed to your bill of sale. The prosecution has got him here." And so the paper was not produced and the case for the defense fell flat.

In the mean time Will Simpson, whose mother had given that Christmas dinner on Wind River, conducted the prosecution, for he had recently been elected district attorney; and, although he was among those who had cherished a warm man to man liking for the defendant, he did his part so vigorously that he got a conviction and Judge Jesse Knight sentenced Cassidy to two years in the penitentiary at Laramie City.

On the evening before Cassidy's departure to serve his sentence Ben Sheldon, the clerk of the court, was watering his garden, when the night jailer leaned over the fence.

"Sheriff Ward," the jailer said, "is out of town, and Butch Cassidy wants me to leave him loose tonight. He says there's something he wants to tend to and that nobody in town will see him. He promises he'll show up by the break of day."

"If Cassidy says so," Ben Sheldon answered, "he'll keep his word."

And so the convicted man went forth that night, no one knew where; nor did any one ever learn whom he saw. He was back at the jail door before dawn and went to Laramie City that same day to begin serving his sentence.

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ABOUT a year and a half later two men sat down together in the warden's office of the Wyoming penitentiary. The prison officials withdrew leaving the pair facing each other like two good poker players after the draw when all the rest at the table have dropped out. Butch Cassidy was one of them. The other was W. A. Richards, the former president of the stockman's association. Now he was Governor of the State and Cassidy was suing for pardon.

Governor Richards had good reasons for this visit. Many men had signed the petition for pardon. Among them was Judge Jesse Knight, who had gone to the extent of making a personal intercession for the man whom he had sentenced. Somehow or other Cassidy had earned his liking, as he did that of most men with whom he came in contact—save those who gained their acquaintance across the barrel of a six-shooter. The judge and his fellow petitioners had managed to interest Wyoming's governor, but there were other motives to bring him to Laramie City. He was not saying anything about these.

His political opponents had a nickname for the chief executive. "He of the Stony Countenance" is what they called him. His features had never been more absolute in their impassivity than they were now, and his brows had never seemed so bushy.

"What's the reason you want a pardon?" he asked.

"I've only a few months left to do." Cassidy's eyes bored straight into the governor's. "So it don't make much difference to the State if I go now. But it makes a heap of difference with me. I've some property down in Colorado."

He went on to explain how the restoration of his citizenship would be of great material benefit to him.

Governor Richards listened to him in silence and he weighed his own reasons for his visit in his mind. During the last year and a half he had learned much concerning the horse thieves who were making life a burden for the Wyoming stockmen. Sheriff John Ward had told him how powerful the band was; and how this young fellow was undoubtedly among their leaders. There was a great deal which the governor did not yet know, but he had enough to make him certain that the man whom he was facing was going to be a big menace to the state if he kept on in the way he had been going. He knew this breed; he had ridden with them and hired them and dealt with them through the years.

I'm only a cowboy. I know I done wrong.

He had sung the song himself and he understood a good many things about cowboys, including the large part that luck played in those days in separating the sheep from the goats. So now he made his proposition.

"If you'll give me your word that you'll straighten up, perhaps——"

But the prisoner interrupted him with assurances that he did not intend to reform. There was no use of his making any such promises. He had gone too far to take the back track, and he did not propose to lie about it. Being an old cowman the governor began to feel secure in one thing—here was a man whose word he could trust.

It is not known whether Cassidy had an inkling of the stake that Governor Richards was playing for. But the fact remains that at this juncture he made his counter-proposition.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "If you'll give me a pardon, I'll promise you that I'll never molest the state of Wyoming again."

And so it came about that the two of them made a treaty then and there; and from this time on those members of the Wild Bunch who stole horses and robbed trains in Wyoming, operated under Harvey Logan, while Butch Cassidy did his plundering elsewhere.

When he left the penitentiary there were two young fellows, friends of his, in the Green River jail awaiting trial on charges of stock rustling. They were both penniless. He went across the line to Montpelier, Idaho, robbed the bank, brought $8,000 of the proceeds to Rock Springs where he turned it over to the lawyer defending the pair; and then he vanished down in the Brown's Park country.

Years afterward Governor Richards told the story of the pardon to the executive of a neighboring commonwealth and when the latter had heard it out—

"I wish," he said with feeling, "that you had gotten him to extend his amnesty to the State of Utah."

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CHARLEY SIRINGO, who used to be one of the Panhandle's wild young riders and afterward went to man-hunting as a vocation, gives in his reminiscences a glimpse of Cassidy during the journey southward after the Montpelier robbery. The outlaw and his companions were lying over at a little settlement in the Snake River country throwing the looted money away across the only bar in the place as fast as they could manage it, when Cassidy discovered an old widow who owned a flock of chickens. She had come into the country in the early days and was famous far and wide for her profanity. Tossing gold over the counter for lukewarm whisky was beginning to get monotonous. He sought out the widow's feathered flock and listened joyously to her swearing while he shot the heads off her hens. When he had plumbed the depths of her vocabulary he counted the slain and gave her a twenty-dollar piece for every chicken.

If you care to go to the trouble, open an old atlas to the maps of Utah and Colorado. In the northwestern corner of the latter state, with the Uintah Indian reservation bordering it on the west and the Red desert on the north, lay the Brown's Park country. Two hundred miles due south you will find the Uncompaghre plateau; and over in Utah nearly straight west of this, in San Juan County, is a mesa which men called the Robbers' Roost. These were the rendezvous where his portion of the Wild Bunch used to hide out after robberies. They may have changed the boundary monument which marks the common corner of Utah, Colorado and Wyoming, but there was a time when you could have found carved thereon—had you ridden to that lonely spot in the mountains—the names of Butch Cassidy, Flat Nosed George Curry and Camella Hanks.

There are plenty of men who used to drink with them in Vernal. Green River, Utah, on the Denver and Rio Grande, saw them often. Matt Warner kept a saloon there and they were among the most boisterous of his customers. Sometimes they rode into the sleepy little town of Bluff away down in the country where the rivers run beneath great natural bridges whittled from the sandstone; and bought themselves .30-.30 cartridges. One could gather a hundred jovial anecdotes from these places; but it was another story when they went about their business.

Officers are warned to have sufficient assistance and be fully armed, when attempting to arrest these outlaws, as they are always heavily armed and will make a determined resistance before submitting to arrest, not hesitating to kill if necessary.

So reads one of the old reward circulars. There were bank employees in Telluride and cowboys in Rout County and express messengers on more than one railway who could vouch for that statement after looking past the muzzles of leveled six-shooters into the faces of the men who held the weapons on them. Utah and Colorado lost several brave peace officers in grim battles with the band out on the broken uplands. But none of those dead are laid to Cassidy's account.

"I've never killed a man yet, nor robbed anybody, only a big corporation," he told Beecher Sheldon one day during these years.

That was in Reno, Nevada. Young Sheldon who had known him in the Lander days, recognized him on the street and, catching up with him, laid his hand on the outlaw's shoulder.

"Hello Butch!" he cried.

Cassidy whirled at the touch and before the words were out, he was holding his six-shooter on the speaker under his coat.

"Oh, it's you, Beecher." He shoved the weapon back into its holster. "You're not going to tell anybody?"

And when the other had assured him on this point, they talked of old times. He wound up with that statement as to his record. and the circulars of the detective agencies contain no accusation to the contrary. He owned a marvellous coolness which more than once kept him from shooting; but that can not be said of some others who rode with him—nor of the swarthy little man who was leading the northern bandits during these years in Wyoming.

There was more than one real killer in the Wild Bunch and if this tow-haired rowdy, who came to be the most formidable outlaw of them all had not been endowed with good luck and a remarkable repression when it came to using his trigger-finger, his story would never have begotten the sympathy which it did. For it includes but one slaying and that came at the very last—and under circumstances which lift it to the height of clean tragedy.

One night he came to Castle Gate. It

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was the evening before pay-day, and the coal camp in the Wasatch Mountains was waiting on the morrow. Gambling tables were ready in the saloons and numbers of the cold-faced fraternity who made their livings by following the paymaster from place to place, were here from Denver and Salt Lake. Near the lower end of the street a quiet poker game was going on in one of the drinking establishments.

It was the only activity of its sort in Castle Gate that evening and it was proceeding listlessly enough when Cassidy entered the place. His worn overalls, soiled sombrero and high-heeled boots proclaimed him to be a cowboy and the languid tinhorns who were pitting their skill against one another for the sake of passing away the time were more than ready to let him sit in. As the evening grew older his big face became tighter set, his puckered blue eyes grew harder, and when two hours or so had gone by, he shoved back his wide-brimmed hat.

"Well boys," he said, "you've cleaned me."

With that he sauntered over to the bar and beckoned to the proprietor.

"There's two or three of us camping just outside the town," he explained, "and we're going out with some cattle down Price way in the morning. The boys sent me in to buy three bottles of Old Crow. I kind of hate to go back to them without the whisky."

"Sure," the saloon-keeper told him, for when he is the owner of the game a man can afford to be magnanimous to one who has dropped one hundred and fifty dollars. "That's all right, fellow. The liquor's on me."

He reached to the back bar and wrapped up three bottles—

"Here, take 'em along."

But Cassidy shook his head.

"That ain't the idee," said he. "I'm willing to pay for it. All that I'm asking for is credit."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, hand me the money next time you're riding by," the proprietor bade him.

So Cassidy departed with the bottles under his arm and nobody thought any more about the matter.

It was some time near noon the next morning when the west-bound passenger train pulled in, and the miners were lining the sidewalk to watch the big monthly event—the arrival of the paymaster. Those were the days before the first great coal strike in Utah and Colorado, and most of the men were of the old Pennsylvania-Irish breed, as tough a crowd as you could find in any Western camp. Many of them carried weapons and were willing enough to use them on occasion.

Castle Gate lies in the depths of a steep walled cañon. The main street is within a stone's throw of the railroad track, and almost opposite the depot there was at that time a two-story stone building which contained the company's offices.

The paymaster alighted from the Pullman with a leather sack of money in either hand, and beside him came his armed guard with two big caliber revolvers hanging from his belt. They left the depot platform and crossed the street toward the stone building. And the miners were so intent upon the spectacle of those two sacks containing their monthly wages that they did not notice the pair of roughly dressed riders who had come up the thoroughfare from the camp's lower end. So Butch Cassidy and Bob Leigh had swung from their saddles and were facing the paymaster with drawn revolvers before that official, his armed guard or any one else took any thought of them.

"Han's up," Cassidy bade them.

They say the guard was a good man with his six-shooters but he had no opportunity to demonstrate his skill that morning. He and the paymaster stood with uplifted arms while Bob Leigh stepped forward, took the money bags, backed away to his pony, tied the sacks across the horn and swung into the saddle. Cassidy remained facing the victims, holding his revolver on the two of them, the while he walked slowly backward, reaching with his left hand for his pony's reins.

Just then a miner up the street started shooting.

A clerk in the coal company's offices on the second floor of the stone building heard the report, glanced through the window and, seeing what was going on, seized an old Sharps single-shot rifle which was hanging on the wall. He ran to the landing of the stair flight which led up along the outside, took hasty aim and pulled the trigger. The slug raised a little dust in front of the pony's forefeet and the bronco shied away with a snort of fright just as Cassidy's fingers were about to close on the reins.

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The outlaw held his eyes on the pair before him; his six-shooter remained leveled upon them; he edged toward the horse—without turning his head.

"Whoa boy," he said soothingly. "Easy now."

The pony backed off still farther. The clerk reloaded and the old Sharps boomed again.

"Hurry Butch," Bob Leigh cried and added an oath for emphasis.

Three or four miners started shooting up the street. Slugs were snarling by and some of them were coming pretty close. Cassidy's eyes had become two blue pin-points; they never left the faces of the men before him as he answered evenly over his shoulder:

"Oh, ——. Those fellows don't know how to shoot."

He took another step toward the bronco.

"Easy! Easy!"

He always had a way with horses. His left hand found the reins. Now he stood beside the animal. The armed guard was showing symptoms of uneasiness.

"Just keep'em up where they be," Cassidy bade him, and swung into the saddle.

Every one who had a gun took a shot at the pair as they ran their horses down the street, but the outlaw had their marksmanship pretty well appraised. All the bullets went wild.

Now telegraph instruments began clicking frantic summons. The sheriff got out a posse down at Price. They followed the trail of the robbers across the country to Castle Valley. Men in Huntington told them how the fugitives had ridden through the village in broad daylight. The track took the pursuers off into the south; it led them over the desert reaches of the San Rafael swell, down into the bluffs which drop toward the headwaters of the Colorado. But Cassidy and Bob Leigh had got a change of horses somewhere along the route and they made one hundred miles without a stop across the arid wilderness. The weary posse returned to the railroad on jaded ponies.

In the mean time the saloon-keeper who had given Butch Cassidy the three bottles of whisky had been raising lamentations. No voice in all the camp was so loud against the outlaws; he delved into the depths of an exhaustive vocabulary to find terms fit for their perfidy. For they had taken with them the best horse in his corral.

Just about the time the first members of the posse returned, he changed his tune. The horse had come back, and tied to its crupper there was a packet containing ten dollars of the stolen money and a hastily scrawled note which said—

This is pay for the three bottles of Old Crow.

IN THE early days of the Spanish War there was a brief period when the excitement over Cuba was almost overshadowed in several cities of the Rocky Mountain West by tidings that the Wild Bunch was gathering for a great foray. The train robbers and stock rustlers of Utah, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado were rendezvoused near Steamboat Springs; some reports said there were fifty outlaws in the camp; the newspapers were filled with conjectures concerning the coming raid.

No doubt the number of the band was exaggerated; but there was no lack of official confirmation when it came to essential facts; a dozen or more of the most desperate bandits in the West had assembled in the mountains; among them were Butch Cassidy, Bob Leigh, Harry Lonabaugh and the two Curry brothers—Harvey and "Lonny" Logan.

It was a situation to worry the most lymphatic of peace officers—and as for the express companies, why there was not one of their cars went through now but carried two or more heavily armed guards in addition to the messenger. The governors of Utah, Wyoming and Colorado gathered in Salt Lake City to discuss measures of protection.

The conference of executives was attended by representatives of one or two well-known detective agencies and by several man-hunters who had earned good reputations in their own communities. It was bombarded by free advice and petitions for immediate action. The popular idea seemed to be to call out the militia; but the old-timers among the peace officers gave it out cold as their opinion, that such a step would mean the massacre of a considerable number of young men who might be useful in their home towns.

So there was a good deal of discussion and the trio of governors listened to a whole lot of data, some of it authentic and some of it pretty thinly stretched, concerning the leaders of the outlaws, their hiding-places

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and the unmarked trails which ran between them. And while they were in the midst of all this, Governor Richards got word from Sheriff John Ward who had come to Salt Lake City with him, that the latter was leaving town on a confidential errand whose nature he could not divulge.

On the next day the sheriff returned and told the story of his journey to Wyoming's governor.

Butch Cassidy had sent for him. He got the message from a man who met him on the street. Complying with the directions which this intermediary gave him, he took the Denver and Rio Grande eastbound train in the afternoon and went to Soldier's Summit, which was as lonely a station as you could find in all the Western mountain passes—a water-tank, a little depot and some coal sheds on the crest of a wind-blown divide where the snow hangs nine months of the year. Here he waited for the coming of the night.

At the appointed hour Sheriff Ward struck out along the ridge; and when he had gone more than a mile through the darkness, he reached the rendezvous—an open space among the gnarled old trees. Here was a log. He seated himself upon it and Butch Cassidy came to him out of the darkness.

The two shook hands. They talked of bygones, of the old Wyoming days, of men who had died with their boots on since they last saw each other. And then the outlaw came down to business. He spoke of the conference of the governors, the talk of the militia and the guards on the express cars.

"You can tell the companies," said he, "to take their gunmen off the trains. They ain't going to need 'em. Nothing is going to come off and you've got my word for that."

So Sheriff Ward told Wyoming's governor, and shortly afterward the conference adjourned *sine die*.

For the outlaws had gathered near Steamboat Springs to see if there were not some way by which they could enlist in Torrey's Rough Rider regiment which was being recruited at the time to go to Cuba.

THAT project of going to fight the Spaniards came to nothing. Many stories have been told of leaders of the Wild Bunch in various Western companies, but the tales were apocryphal. The chances of arrest were too great and all of them went back to robbery.

Two years or so after he met John Ward near Soldiers' Summit, Cassidy had occasion to send another message to a Colorado sheriff. A civil engineer by the name of Johnston, who was in the employ of the Department of the Interior surveying boundary lines for Indian reservations, was working with his party on the Uncompaghre plateau. One evening they camped at a cabin where Cassidy and several members of the Wild Bunch were stopping.

This man Johnston had met all manner of queer customers, for his business took him into the most sparsely settled sections of America; and these were not the first wanted men with whom he had sat down to supper. The nature of his calling—which was announced by the instruments the men carried—had always placed him in the rôle of a non-combatant. So he spent a pleasant evening with Butch Cassidy, who told him tales of bronco busting and maintained that on one occasion he had competed with the pick of the Western riders in Denver, right under the noses of the police.

In the morning when the surveyors were about to depart, Cassidy called Johnston aside.

"Along about the time you're coming out of the narrow cañon five miles west of here," said he, "you'll meet some fellows riding this way. It's the sheriff of Rout County and a posse. Tell 'em we know they're coming and the best thing they can do is to turn back."

All of which came out as the outlaw had said it would, and the sheriff, being a man of common sense, followed the advice.

IN THOSE days Judge Powers of Salt Lake was one of the most widely known criminal lawyers in the whole West. He was sitting in his private office one morning when his stenographer entered.

"There's a man outside wishes to see you on business," she announced.

"Who is he?" asked the lawyer.

She shook her head.

"I asked him for his name, but he refused to give it."

Naturally Judge Powers was used to meeting men who were not overanxious to proclaim their identity. A Western lawyer in those days got some clients under circumstances which would seem remarkable in this

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later decade. So he shrugged his shoulders and bade the girl show the visitor in. The man seemed to be somewhere in his forties, although some of the lines on his big face might have come from hard living in the open and from whisky; his hair which had been flaxen, was shot with gray; a rough-looking customer, dressed in overalls and a blue denim jumper.

He seated himself on the edge of an office chair, holding his battered hat in both hands, and fixed his blue eyes on Judge Powers. When the girl had closed the door behind her he demanded—

"Is what I say to you to go as a client consulting with his lawyer from now on?"

"You mean," Judge Powers countered, "a privileged communication?"

"That's it," said the visitor.

The lawyer gave his consent.

"All right then," the man breathed deeply. "I'm Butch Cassidy."

Judge Powers stared at him for a moment, and then the humor of the situation struck him. He threw back his head and laughed long and loud. Cassidy grinned.

"Well," Judge Powers said when he had recovered his dignity, "what can I do for you?"

"I'll tell you," the outlaw answered quickly. "There's a heap of charges out against me and considerable money offered for me in rewards. And I'm getting sick of hiding out. Always on the run and never able to stay in one place. Now when it comes to the facts, I've kept close track of things and I know there ain't a man left in the country who can go on the stand and identify me for any crime. All of 'em have either died or gone away. And I've been thinking—why can't I just go and give myself up and stand trial on any of them old charges?"

Judge Powers sat silent for some time thinking it over; and at last he spoke.

"No use. You've robbed too many big corporations in your time. I do not doubt what you say; but if you were ever to go to trial you can depend on it, some of those companies would bring somebody to the stand who'd swear against you. No. You'll have to keep on the run, I'm afraid."

NOT many months after that visit Harvey Logan and several other members of the Wild Bunch robbed the Union Pacific passenger train at dawn near Wilcox, Wyoming. They fled across the Laramie plains. At Teapot Rocks some twenty-five miles from Casper, a posse overtook them and retreated after a hot fight. Twenty miles farther on Deputy Sheriff Joseph Hazen and a number of cowboys brought them to a stand in a rocky ravine. They slew the deputy, but the cowboys stuck to it and managed to cut them off from their horses.

After dark the outlaws broke through the cordon of their pursuers, stole the horses of a freight outfit which was camped a few miles away, and later outdistanced the officers who had meantime come out from Casper, by fording the Powder River which was raging, banks full, in a Summer freshet.

Now men were gathered to storm the Hole in the Wall, and while these parties were riding into the Big Horn mountains, the robbers scattered, to meet in a cabin at the crossing of the Little Muddy between Fort Washakie and Thermopylis. There they divided their loot and Butch Cassidy was present when this took place.

Will Simpson, who had prosecuted him in Lander back in 1892, met the outlaw in a near-by town soon afterward and taxed him with having broken his promise to Governor Richards. But Cassidy assured him he had taken no part in the Wilcox robbery. And furthermore he had no intention of violating his word. He was, he said, planning to leave the United States, just as soon as he could make certain arrangements. And from other things, which other men have let drop, it seems that he had come to the cabin at the crossing of the Little Muddy to confer with Harvey Logan and Harry Lonabaugh concerning that project.

At that time the Argentine was attracting many men from the vanishing ranges of the Rocky Mountain country. A number of cowmen and cowboys had gone thither from Texas as early as 1880; and after the Johnson County war quite a few Wyoming men had followed their example. There was a great deal of open country down in the Argentine, some of the best cattle country in the world; and there was no extradition treaty with our Government. The leaders of the Wild Bunch made up their minds to leave for Buenos Aires and take up life anew out on the great level pampas.

But things were beginning to happen too swiftly for them to carry out their plans just yet. Harvey Logan's brother Lonny was traced back to Dodson, Missouri, while he

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was making an Eastern visit, and was killed by a posse who surrounded the house where he was stopping. Bob Leigh, who had taken part in the Wilcox hold-up, was arrested, convicted and sentenced to fifteen years in the penitentiary. Flat Nosed George was slain by a Utah sheriff near Green River. The Pinkerton detective agency had the names and descriptions of most of the outlaws; rewards were offered for them; operatives were nosing out their trails. Cassidy went into hiding. Harvey Logan got a number of his followers together and held up a Union Pacific train, but the express car was empty when they opened it.

If the leaders wanted to go to South America, they were going to need more money than they had now. So Cassidy and Logan joined forces for the first time since the days before the former's arrest at Hames Fork, and took Harry Lonabaugh along with them to rob the First National Bank at Winnemucca, Nevada.

During the noon hour on September 19th, 1900, these three men, Cassidy, Logan and Lonabaugh, rode into Winnemucca and tied their horses on a side-street. George S. Nixon, afterward United States Senator from Nevada, and at that time cashier of the First National Bank, was in his office talking with W. S. Johnson, a cattle buyer. In the main room were the assistant-cashier, a bookkeeper and a stenographer. The outlaws entered the front door, held up the five men at the point of their revolvers, forced Nixon to open the safe, dumped $32,000 into an ore sack and took their victims into the back yard where they lined them up along the building wall.

Now one of the robbers leaped a high blind fence into the alley; the others threw the money over to him and straightway followed him to their horses. While they were riding away Nixon and his companions ran back into the bank, secured a rifle and might have made things lively for the fugitives who were in full view, had not the cashier in his hurry jammed a cartridge in the magazine.

Within an hour a posse was on the trail. They followed it into the northeast. At Silva's ranch some thirty odd miles out they learned that the outlaws were a scant hour ahead of them. They got a relay of horses and pressed on harder. Later they procured fresh mounts again; but after they had gone a hundred miles, with sometimes less than ten miles between them and the fugitives, the tracks of the latters' ponies vanished.

Two months later, while detective agencies were sending operatives all over the West and while the reward circulars were going to every sheriff's office beyond the Mississippi, the wanted trio met Ben Kilpatrick and Bob Carver of the Wild Bunch in San Antonio, Texas, and the five had a group photograph taken. That picture was to be a souvenir, for after their next meeting, they planned to scatter to foreign lands. It shows them in their town clothes, with stiff hats tilted back on their heads; and Harvey Logan wears a nosegay in his buttonhole.

The five came together again in June of the next year in the Milk River country in northeastern Montana. With them was Cammella Hanks. At Wagner, a little flag station one hundred and ninety-six miles east of Great Falls, they held up the Great Northern westbound passenger at two o'clock in the afternoon. While they were blowing open the door of the express car Sheriff Griffith of Great Falls leaped from the rear Pullman and opened fire on them.

A fusillade of rifle shots sent him to cover and caused a number of the more curious among the passengers to duck back within the windows. A sheepherder, who had been attracted by the noise, rode up close to see what was going on; and one of the bandits killed his horse under him. Then the six swung into their saddles with something over forty thousand dollars in bills, which were consigned to a Helena bank.

Posses took their trail. The outlaws rode southward, sometimes less than fifteen miles ahead of their pursuers; to whom they sent jocular messages by such cowboys as they met on the way. When they had gone about one hundred and fifty miles they "put out" their trail by the old blanket trick and separated to rendezvous down in the Little Rockies where they divided the loot.

Cassidy went to Alma, New Mexico, not far from the head of the Animas Valley and waited word from his companions. Under the name of Jim Lowe he bought a saloon and was doing well at selling whisky, when an operative from a famous detective agency got wind of his hiding-place and came hither to investigate. The man, who was from the East, made the mistake of confiding his errand to two of the town's business men,

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one of whom happened to be the pseudo Jim Lowe.

There were several stock rustlers and horse thieves hiding in Alma at the time, and when they got wind of the situation they took the detective prisoner. They were escorting him to the town limits, where it was their intention to hang him to a cottonwood limb; but Cassidy intervened and saved the life of the investigator, who left Alma without suspecting the identity of his preserver.

Meantime things had not been going so well with the rest of the Wild Bunch. Ben Kilpatrick was arrested in St. Louis, Missouri. Old Cammella Hanks was taken somewhere in the south; and Harvey Logan was captured down in Tennessee. All three of them were sentenced to terms of varying lengths. Kilpatrick served his time. Hanks made a spectacular escape in Knoxville and was killed a year later in a bloody battle with peace officers down in San Antonio, Texas. Bob Carver was slain in a brawl in northern Mexico. Logan managed to bribe a guard in the Knoxville jail, while waiting to be taken to prison, and fled to the mountains on a saddle horse.

Harry Lonabaugh had been lying quiet in a well-known sanitarium in Buffalo, New York. He and his wife were the first to leave America. They took a steamer down to Buenos Aires some time in 1902. Not long afterward Harvey Logan followed them. And at about the same time Cassidy went to Liverpool in a cattle boat. Thence he made his way to the Argentine and joined his companions. And it is in the lonely western pampas of that land that the story comes to its grim end.

The three men went to cattle raising and were doing well. In those days the government of the southern republic was still selling enormous tracts of range land for a small figure. Labor was cheap; and the great packing companies were beginning to establish freezing stations along the railroads and navigable rivers.

But it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks. The habit of raiding was in these men. And among the baggy-trousered *Gauchos*—the cowhands of the pampas—there were many hard characters who had formerly done a great deal of bush-whacking in various revolutions, with a bit of robbery every now and then between times. The American outlaws joined forces with these natives in one or two forays into Chile. At least Lonabaugh did. One day when he had returned to the little town on the eastern side of the Andes where he and the other Americans had been sojourning, a detachment of swarthy soldiers came after him. They surrounded the house.

Cassidy was in the place at the time. What had become of Logan, has not been told; but he was absent. And there is no authentic account of him from there on. When the military began firing on the building Lonabaugh was asleep. It was just at daybreak.

That was the situation. Cassidy looked forth and saw the soldiers closing in. Rifle in hand and loaded down with cartridges, he started to leave the building. He ran through the room where his old companion had been sleeping, and found him dead with a bullet through his body.

Cassidy leaped through a window and ran to a stone-walled corral one hundred yards or so away. He slipped through a cattle-chute which led from the main pen into a smaller enclosure. Here he took his stand and did his first killing of which record has come down.

There were more than one hundred soldiers. But the only entrance to the outlaw's stronghold was the narrow chute, with barely room for two men abreast. And when they had tried that route three or four times, they gave it up. Then they charged the high walls, but those who reached the summit died in the instant of the attainment. Their bodies lay drooped upon the barrier.

So it went on for all that day. And some time during the next morning Cassidy's ammunition ran low. The soldiers were not charging any longer now. They lay behind such cover as they could find, holding the corral encircled. And thus they remained all that day. And on the next morning their officers determined on another advance.

This time they went by way of the main cattle-pen and on through the narrow chute. And when the first of them came into the smaller enclosure he uttered a loud shout, for Cassidy was lying dead.

They found him with his rifle beside him and in his hand his big single-action forty-five revolver. The last cartridge was discharged. And the bullet hole in the center of his forehead testified as to the trueness of the aim.

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So Cassidy died. The thing took place in 1906. By that time the automobile was beginning to make its appearance on the country roads of Wyoming and Colorado; the barbed-wire fences had enclosed the last remnants of the open ranges. The New West had come to take the place of the Old West. And the conditions which created the cowboy outlaws were gone forever.

# EAGLES

## by Frank H. Huston

FROM the dawn of antiquity, fur and feathers have played an important part in the vesture and adornment of the human species; but it remained for the American Indian to invest them with mystic and sacred properties.

With one exception, eagle feathers have been looked upon by all tribes from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Inuit to the Patagonian, as the most desirable and of greatest magic potency. The exception is the plains or buffalo Indians and adjacent tribes, who considered the plumes of the road-runner, the *wakan*, or medicine, bird, as the most powerful and sacred.

In procuring plumes for the feathered head-dresses, medicine lances, pipes and other purposes, a certain ritual was necessary and was always rigidly followed. No blood could be shed in their acquisition; killing at unprescribed times or not in the prescribed manner being considered an act of sacrilege, and rendering the feathers valueless for any purpose.

The tail and wing feathers were mostly used, having a greater significance, as well as being larger and more adaptable for general purposes than the lesser plumage.

Having in 1873, at the instance of my *ba-ni* (partner) or Indian chum, gone through the required forms and procured enough to make me a *wakuna* or war-bonnet, even after the lapse of years the method and difficulties have remained vividly in my memory.

My first step was a sweat-bath to purify me for the ensuing ceremonial, though generally this part was omitted. As a rule the warrior, going to a hill in a locality where eagles were plentiful, dug there a pit large enough to conceal himself in, roofing it over with small limbs, grass and dirt, but leaving an orifice a foot or two in diameter at the top in the center.

The following night he remained, generally alone—but in my case accompanied by *Gaa* and the medicine man to repeat the words and instruct me, a greenhorn as it were—singing the "Eagle Songs," and in the morning, fasting and without having drunk, he proceeded to his blind and concealed himself therein, with a large hunk of raw meat or tallow on the top fastened by a rope held by himself. Sometimes, to lend realism, a grass-stuffed coyote or dog pelt would be placed near by. Should animals or small birds appear they were quietly driven away.

An eagle, alighting within reach, was seized by the legs, drawn into the pit and strangled, or its neck broken, care being taken that no drop of the bird's blood be shed. As to the trappers, that was "another story yet," an eagle, being no chicken, generally left his mark and after each capture some repairs to the roof were required. Sometimes several would be taken in a day's vigil, while again the entire four days permitted—note the mystic number four—might prove barren of results.

At any rate, be his luck good or bad, at the expiration of that period, fasting throughout the day, his operations ceased, not to be resumed until after several weeks or months had passed.

At nightfall he could return to his teepee to sleep and eat, but each morning before sunrise he had to return fasting to the pit and remain so until sunset.

Incidentally, the breast feathers of the bluebird, the fur of the otter, the latter ranking as fur with the plumes of the road-runner, were also taken without spilling of blood, the former being killed with sticks or blunt arrows and the latter trapped or drowned; but in either case a drop of blood rendered them valueless and the carcass was abandoned.

In the order of their desirability the eagles ranked: golden, bald, brown and lastly the spotted tail. The bluffs of the Missouri and foot-hills of the Black Hills were favorite trapping-grounds.

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CARNIVALS figure considerably in Thomson Burtis' complete novel in this issue, and he tells here something about them. And about the flying, too, of course.

The yarn, somewhat of a new departure for me, causes me to rise, stick one hand in my bosom, and orate a bit.

FIRST, it is built on the idea of a traveling carnival being the home-base of a clever criminal. This is absolutely O. K. The average carnival is like a serpent crawling across the country, leaving in its wake a slimy trail of robbery in all its variations, venereal disease, etc. Carnivals are now barred by practically every big city in the country, and State civic societies are fighting them tooth and nail. Too many of them work every game from crooked games to sneak-thieving the houses during the parade, bootleg, sell drugs, and most of the women are prostitutes, the grifters swarm, short-change artists are supreme, their shows and games and general activities are limited only by what the traffic will stand. *Variety*, the theatrical Bible, has been conducting a campaign against them which has resulted in action of State legislatures in many cases, and *Variety* calls it the sewer of the show business. I know all this personally, and vouch for the fact that the premise of my yarn is absolutely O. K. Step to a newstand and buy a copy of *Variety* and you will find a lot of details that will back me up.

SECOND, the story revolves around a criminal who relies on a clever disguise. This disguise is also absolute fact. In Washington, D. C., when I was there a few months ago, a man was sentenced and the judge publicly stated that he was sorry he could not give him life because he was such a danger to society through use of this disguise.

THIRD, the incident of the man half-falling out of a ship in the loop. An incident to which there are over two hundred witnesses, is my basis for that, and it's far more wild and woolly than the one in the story—so wild I didn't dare use it without toning down. Truth is stranger than fiction. Ain't I the original wise-cracker. I never heard that before.

I could go on almost indefinitely about the details. All I want to say, though, is bound up in this: that not a single major element in the story is the outgrowth of my own imagination, but has its counterpart in either the daily papers or in things I have heard from detectives, carnival men, etc. There have been several aerial gunfights on the borders of our great and glorious bootleggery. And the use of the air in the future is going to revolutionize crime the way automobiles did. Possibilities are limitless.

I got my carnival color over in West Virginia one time when I spent most of a week with a friend of mine whom I met the night when I spieled the freak show for the Wortham Shows at the Battle of San Jacinto, a San Antonio festival. This friend owned a minstrel show with a carnival in West Virginia, and it was playing the town where I was stranded with a Martin bomber and fifteen hundred pounds of bombs. I got a chance to see how the wheels went around, and smell of the living-cars.—BURTIS.

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IF COMRADE Hastings will, next time he's in New York, run up to the Museum of Natural History, he'll surely have a good time. I lived in New York some sixteen years before I ever went inside the Museum. Went to take my boy. We agreed on making a scouting-trip over the whole building to pick out the things on which we'd spend our time. By the time the scouting-trip was finished so were the afternoon and we ourselves.

Kansas City, Missouri.

Dear Camp-Fire: Excuse my horning in, but I just wish to add a little information, to the recent article by Earl Emmons regarding Captain Keogh's mount Comanche.

THIS is in no way a criticism, as to the best of my knowledge this record of Comanche is accurate, but he quit too quickly with Comanche. Comanche's honors did not cease with his military funeral at Fort Riley, but he was turned over to the Dyche Museum of Kansas University, Lawrence, Kansas, where he received the best attention of their expert, and at present holds a post of honor on the main floor of the Museum. Mounted and in



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full military trappings, a copy of G. O. No. 7 in the front of his case, Comanche is the first of the many interesting exhibits which greet you when you walk in on the main floor of the Museum.

Incidentally if any of the Camp-Fire boys happen to be near Lawrence, it will well be worth the time to make a side trip and spend a day going through the Dyche Museum at Kansas University.

This is far and away the best thing in the line of a natural history exhibit I have ever seen and is carried out in detail showing the many animals of the North American continent as nearly as possible in natural environment. I will not attempt to describe it, but will name just one instance where on a small stretch of sandy desert land, studded with sagebrush and cactus, one group of exhibits represents a mother coyote lying on the ground watching her brood at their feed, while two of the pups are staging a bout trying to take a sage-hen away from each other. All the other exhibits are worked out along the same lines.

THIS is my first attempt to break in with the bunch and did so merely because I thought the information might be of interest to others as well as to two or three of the boys with whom I have talked. I often see articles in "Camp-Fire" to which I could add my little bit and ofttimes think I would like to write in discussing some of the points which the boys raise. More especially is this true, where these discussions relate to something in the Southwest, as I am more or less familiar wth that little strip of territory which lies between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Coast.

I am afraid I am going to get this so long that it will find the waste basket instead of the readers. So, wishing Camp-Fire continued success, I beg to remain.—R. B. HASTINGS.

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AN OLD-TIMER who knew Custer, Sitting Bull and other characters identified with the West of past days is brought to Camp-Fire by one of our comrades:

St. Anthony, North Dakota.

"Bad Medicine" interested me very much, for I am intimately acquainted with a party who was with Reno's command at the time. He has been in this country for 52 years, since 1870. I have spent many a pleasant hour listening to his stories of adventure in early days under Custer. This old gentleman also has the original discharge given to Bloody Knife, scout for Custer, which I read last Winter, signed by Custer. The old gentleman's name is Mr. Wm. Zahu, of Solen, N. Dakota, Standing Rock, Ind. Res. His youngest boy attended my school last Winter.

His memory is marvelous as to detail, dates, names, etc. He is about 75, very spry, and promises to live a good many years. He is the father of seven or eight children, all very bright and well educated. I have heard him often mention Calamity Jane and also the command of the caller after every dance, "Promenade to the bar," as mentioned in "Bad Medicine."

He knew Sitting Bull intimately, who was killed on the Grand River by Red Tomahawk, an Indian brave who lives about 18 miles from here. So you can readily see why I read the story with interest.—C. J. WALCHER.

12

ANOTHER story about his story. F. R. Buckley tells it in connection with "Habit," in this issue.

Nothing particular to tell about this story—except another story; the basis from which "Habit" developed. This germ, which I consider one of the great unsung tragedies of the sea, was told me by my brother when third mate on the barque *Whitlieburn*, Glasgow to Pisagua. They had a Swede bosun, who had the common Swede hobby of carving elaborate new hafts for his sheath-knife, out of teak or some such infernal hard wood. On this voyage, he displayed the most elaborate haft of his career, nearly finished—six months' work; all saints and national heroes and what not. He spent the whole of the outward trip smoothing it to glassy perfection with bits of broken glass and in port at Pisagua fitted it to the knife. No use for the knife in port, so he contented himself with showing it around—very proud. The first day out of port on the eastbound trip, the unfortunate man had occasion to cut a rope's-end, absent-mindedly threw the knife over the side and tried to stuff the rope's end into his sheath. And that's the end of that yarn.—F. R. BUCKLEY.

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THIS letter of February, 1922, is one of those that should have been held out for use as soon as possible instead of going into our cache. But information on the Peg Leg will probably still be welcome. We've had quite a little about it at Camp-Fire and years ago an article or two on it in the magazine, but Mr. Hinde doubtless already has these.

Will the readers of "Camp-Fire" lend a hand? Do any of you know something about the Peg Leg Smith mine? Something that you feel assured is authentic?

THE following quotation, from a daily paper, refers to a trip our party made during November, 1921, as a preliminary survey of the country surrounding the supposed location of the mine.

"Senator S. C. Evans will lead an expedition that will leave Riverside this morning for the territory of the famous Peg Leg Smith gold mine. Other Riversiders in the party will be E. W. Tucker, Harry H. Hinde and H. B. Slater. In the desert they will be joined by a prospector who is said to have been bringing nuggets out of that country and selling them to people in Los Angeles hotels and business houses."

Much information has been received by our party, regarding the location of the gold deposit, directly from native Indians and white men who were born and reared in California. Some of these people have direct knowledge, through their parents, of Peg Leg Smith and his operations.

This information made our trip a success to the extent that a district has been located which harmonizes with the compiled advice, which is thought authentic, and landmarks in the desert. To gain the knowledge of this territory it was necessary to travel in a circuitous route of over five hundred miles.

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WHEN breaking camp one morning there was a half-inch of ice on the water; the afternoon of the same day the thermometer stood at 120 degrees F. Some change! Difference in altitude was about six thousand feet.

A storm drove us out of the hills before the trip was fairly started. This was the first of many of the hardest rain and snow storms the country has experienced during the last fifty years. The first part of this month (February, 1922,) the desert was covered with snow and the washes were running rivers. Thus our trip has been broken into and delayed. When the storms are over we will hit the trail again.

If any of you can furnish a bit of first-hand information, our bunch will be glad to have it.—HARRY H. HINDE, P. O. Box 574, Riverside, Calif.

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SOMETHING about the sources of his article in this issue from Frederick R. Bechdolt:

Carmel.

As to authorities—I owe the story to many sources—the Pinkerton archives; ex-Governor Richards (W. A.) of Wyoming; William L. Simpson, Cody, Wyoming; James Simpson, Jackson's Hole, Wyoming; Ben Sheldon, San Diego, Calif.; E. B. Palmer, Salt Lake; old files of western papers; Charles Siringo's "Cowboy Detective"; and one or two men—one in particular whose name I do not know anyhow—who would not care to have their names mentioned.—BECHDOLT.

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YOU'LL remember that Talbot Mundy told us things about the Great Pyramid. A number of you have taken exception to some of his statements, and the following letter from David R. Cummins states a strong case. When I'd finished reading it my brain was reeling, but, though I couldn't understand all of it, my bump of mathematics being a depression, it seemed to me that it couldn't help but be right at all points. Then I read Mr. Mundy's reply, my brain went out of business and I not only don't know anything but know I don't. It's interesting, though, if you don't lose consciousness, so have a shot at it. It will be easy enough for some of you.

Mansfield, Ohio.

Talbot Mundy's letter on the great pyramid in the Oct. 10 issue aroused my interest in the subject and I found out some very interesting things.

BUT some of the statements in that letter deserve comment. I do not know whether Talbot Mundy intended to present the quotation from Herodotus, which *Jingrim* reads, as authentic but as it seems that he did I wish to call attention to the following two passages which indicate that, according to Herodotus' sources of information, Cheops or Khufu was buried under the great pyramid and that the pyramid was a monument above a tomb even if not, strictly speaking, a tomb itself. They are found in a literal translation of Herodotus by Henry Cary, M. A., at the only reference given in the index after the name Cheops. P. 145, speaking of the causeway . . . "on this road then ten years were expended, and in forming the subterraneous apartments on the hill, on which the pyramids stand, which he had made as a burial vault for himself, in an island formed by draining a canal from the Nile." P. 146, "The Egyptians say that this Cheops reigned fifty years; and when he died, his brother Cephren succeeded to the kingdom; and he followed the same practises as the other both in other respects, and in the building of a pyramid; which does not come up to the dimensions of his brother's, for I myself measured them; nor has it subterraneous chambers; nor does a channel from the Nile flow to it, as to the other; but this flows through an artificial aqueduct round an island within, in which they say the body of Cheops is laid." The last is very bad English but the sense is unmistakable.

MR. MUNDY says that it is the only building in the world that is oriented exactly to the four points of the compass. Of course this exact orientation is impossible and, in fact, could never be proved if it were true, since there are no utterly perfect methods of measuring quantities of any kind. In this case, "A Miracle in Stone," the book mentioned in the article, says that the orientation of the pyramid is faulty by 1 min. 15 sec.; and the Encyclopedia Britannica, in the article on the pyramids written by W. M. Flinders Petrie, gives its azimuth as 3 min. 43 sec. W. which makes the lines of the pyramid depart from the true directions by about 1.3 inches for every hundred feet. As to the accuracy of Petrie's measurements, he says in his book, "Ten Years' Digging in Egypt," that his triangulation of the pyramids in 1891 was carried out with a fine theodolite reading single seconds, the observations being repeated many times, and that scarcely a point had an uncertainty of a quarter inch and most of the points were fixed within one-tenth of an inch. Whether this survey has been checked against later surveys I do not know, but if it has not been and the encyclopedia dimensions are taken from it alone, these dimensions should have an accuracy two to six times as great as the greatest accuracy used by the pyramid builders, as the mean error in length of the sides of the pyramid is given as .65 of an inch. The mean error in angle from a perfect square is 12 seconds of arc. Both errors are so small that they can be covered with the thumb. Such work must have cost infinite trouble.

TALBOT MUNDY says that the measurements extended give the weight of the world in tons and the mean distance between the earth and the sun in miles, but certainly even if there was a close correspondence, which there is not, we could not consider it anything but sheer coincidence, since at the time of the building of the pyramid the determination of English miles and tons was still 5,000 years in the future.

He also says that the base is an exact fraction of the diameter of the earth from pole to pole—one ten-millionth part of the semi-axis. On dividing the semi-axis by the base of the pyramid (20,855,000 ft. by 755.5 ft.) we get 27,597. Mr. Mundy possibly has a confused memory of the so-called

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pyramid cubit of 25.025 inches which is 1-10,000,000 of the earth's semi-axis and which, according to "A Miracle in Stone," divides into the base of the pyramid as many times as there are days in the year.

This last is in line with the theory that the pyramid is an embodiment of astronomical knowledge. The number of days in the year is 365.26, correct to two places. Now when the author of "A Miracle in Stone" divides his natural unit, the pyramid cubit, into the base of the pyramid he obtains 365.23. But this loses some of its wonder when we find that the figure used for the base is not the real base but the distance between certain corner sockets in the rock whose existence would be unknown as long as the pyramid was intact as they were entirely covered by casing and pavement; and further that this figure was arrived at by averaging five different measures and then moving the result an arbitrary number of inches toward what was said to be the most accurate measurement. The actual base divided by 25.025 in. gives 362.

NEXT Talbot Mundy says that the pyramid stands within a few feet of the exact center of the earth's habitable area. On the face of it, this is a strange thing to say, considering the difficulty of finding the center, within a few feet, of the earth's habitable area. How are we to define habitable so as to make it clear what mountains, lakes, deserts and other doubtful regions are to be included and then, having a definition, how are we to apply it to the whole area of the world with any accuracy? Certainly the ancients couldn't do it and probably no two modern scientists could do it conscientiously and agree by 100 miles as to the center.

But it may be that here Talbot Mundy has a confused memory of the statement that the pyramid is located on a parallel of latitude which exactly divides the surface of the northern hemisphere into two equal parts. The latitude of the pyramid is 29 deg. 58 min. 51 sec. And, to be on a line dividing in halves the surface of the northern hemisphere it should be somewhere near the 30 deg. parallel, but, I believe, a few odd miles further south. It has also been suggested that the pyramid was intended to be located one-third of the distance from the equator to the pole. But as long as the most reasonable view of the matter is that the pyramid is a tomb, and so it seems to be, it is natural that it should have been located where it was, in the burying ground near the ancient city of Memphis, at that latitude simply because that was the latitude of the city and its necropolis.

HE SAYS that the inside temperature is the mean of the boiling and freezing points of water at that level. "A Miracle in Stone" says that the temperature is 68 degrees. Also, the pyramids are near the 70 degree mean annual Fahrenheit isotherm. Ordinarily the mean between boiling and freezing points of water is about 122 degrees. Mr. Mundy's statement makes the level of the pyramids higher than the top of the highest of the Alps, Mt. Blanc, which has an altitude of three miles, for at the top of this mountain the mean between the boiling and freezing points of water is only reduced to 108 degrees. The real altitude of the site of the pyramids can not be more than a small fraction of this, situated as they are at the head of the Nile delta.

Next he says that the pyramid appears to establish the scientific basis of English measures as against the metric system. If he means by this that the English system can be shown to satisfy the requirements of scientific work better than the metric, any one who knows the make up of both systems can answer him, to their own satisfaction at least.

HE SAYS that the sarcophagus has the same dimensions as the Jewish Ark of the Covenant. But this can not be, because the ratios between the different dimensions of each are different. The ark, 2½ by 1½ by 1½ cubits; the sarcophagus 7 ft. 6½ in. by 3 ft. 3 in. by 3 ft. 5 in. In "A Miracle in Stone" it is attempted to prove that the Ark had the same internal capacity as the coffer but the author only allows from 1.75 to 2 inches for the thickness of the walls which are evidently considered as flat without any bracing across the grain or at the corners, though this chest was supposed to have been carried on poles on the shoulders of men, with stone tablets inside and to last indefinitely.

Mr. Mundy says that the sarcophagus could not be a coffin because it could not be carried in through the passages. But was the stone sarcophagus ever carried about in the funeral ceremonies? It would seem not. The sarcophagus of the second pyramid was also built in. The wooden cases in which the mummies were inclosed before being put in the sarcophagi would be satisfactory to carry them about in for any ceremonies.

He says that the sarcophagus was empty when the first explorers broke in, but writers are not agreed on this and one old writer says that in 1133 he saw in Cairo the mummy-case Mamun took from the sarcophagus in the king's chamber. Further, Mundy says that nobody can possibly have been ahead of them (Mamun's Arabs) because the passage they entered by was still filled with loose stones and in the next breath that this passage must have been filled up from within and that this makes likely another means of entrance. From the diagrams it seems possible that the well leading down from the grand gallery to the subterranean chamber might be the exit of the men who filled the upward passage and also possibly the entrance of the first robbers. Edgar J. Banks in "The Seven Wonders of the World" says that the passage to the subterranean chamber was evidently open in Roman times because of the Latin words marked on the walls of that chamber.

For the benefit of those who, like Mr. Mundy, consider the great pyramid so emphatically unique, it is well to call attention to the fact that the pyramid of Medum has the same angle of slope and hence that all theories based on the general proportions of the great pyramid apply to the pyramid of Medum as well. The Medum structure is older than the great pyramid.

But though I take exception to Talbot Mundy's facts I did enjoy his story. This was the most satisfactory treasure hunt tale I have read in a long time.

I AM curious to know by what plan the builders of the great pyramid determined its proportions. About the most likely thing for a builder to do, if circumstances permit, is to make the principle dimensions of his building even numbers of

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whatever units of measurement he uses since this will very much simplify his calculations. The great pyramid and the Medum pyramid which have the same angle of slope have bases of 440 and 275 ancient Egyptian cubits, respectively. It is thought that for these two pyramids the builders used the proportion of seven high to eleven wide. This is supported by the fact that 11 divides evenly into the number of cubits in the base of each giving the convenient quantities of 40 and 25 cubits. But the angle of slope of the two pyramids is 51 deg. 52 min. and the side of the great pyramid is 755.7 ft., more accurately 9068.8 in., which makes the height of it (when complete) 5776.0 in. or 481.3 ft. and 7-11 of the base is 5771.0 inches. It seems that as the mean error in the length of the sides was only .65 of an inch we can expect a much smaller error than 5 inches in the height.

There are three other schemes which the builders might have used which would give intended heights nearer to the actual height and so reduce the difference which has to be regarded as error if the scheme is accepted as the one used. They are: Corner rise of 9 ft. in 10 which gives 5771.3 inches for the height, ratio of 3.1416 or pi between the sum of the four sides and twice the height—5773.4 in., and a ratio of 17:21 between the slant height of a face and the base—5773.7 in. The last is only 2.3 inches different from the actual height. There are also two other schemes, one, said to be taken from Herodotus, that the area of a face equalled the square of the height which makes the height 5767.85 in., and another that the corner or edge was 20-21 of the base which gives 5785.8 in. All these except the Herodotus and the pi theories have a simplicity which would, to some extent at least, recommend them to the builder. But I don't think there is conclusive evidence in favor of any one of them and, though probability seems to favor the 7-11 hypothesis, the mystery is not yet satisfactorily solved.

THERE is an interesting theory explained in an article by Percival Lowell in the *Popular Science Monthly* for May, '12. He says that the long entrance passage is so deep that a bright star could be seen from the lower end of it even in daytime and that, allowing for refraction, it would look exactly at a star 3 deg. 34 min. from the pole when the star was at its lower culmination, that is, apparently directly south of the pole. The star Alpha Draconis passed very near the pole in 2785 B. C. and 645 years before or after this date it was 3 deg. 34 min. distant from it. History indicates that, if the passage was built for observing this star, it was at the earlier date 3430 B. C. Petrie dates the pyramid at 4700 B. C.

Lowell suggests that the grand gallery was an observatory for studying the motion of the sun. Supposing that the building of the pyramid was halted at the height of the upper end of the floor of the grand gallery and the gallery's side walls and roof were completed as they now stand but the south or upper end left open, the sun would then shine into it at noon each day. He says that the angle of slope and the length of the floor and the distance by which the south end of the roof overhangs the end of the floor are such that, at that time, the sun at noon in midwinter would cast the shadow of the edge of the roof just on the lower end of the floor and at midsummer on the upper end. Of course, at all other times the shadow would fall somewhere between these two points. Thus the gallery would be a vast sundial showing, not the hour of the day, but the passage of the year. As astronomy in those days was not separated from astrology he suggests that the pyramid may have been used first as an observatory to discover the destiny of the king from the sun and stars and then completed to serve as his tomb.

FLINDERS PETRIE describes the excellent work on the casing stones that are left, the entrance passage, the queen's chamber, and the dressing of the blocks in the king's chamber and says that: "Side by side with this splendid work are the strangest mistakes. After having leveled the casing so finely, the builders made a hundred times the error in leveling the shorter length of the king's chamber." The face of the wall in the grand gallery is rough chiselled and that in the antechamber is without its final dressing while the sarcophagus has much worse work on it than the building. He thinks that the original skilful architect ceased to superintend at a certain point when the lower part of the building was complete and the granite for the king's chamber was dressed but not yet in place. Mistakes such as the kings' chamber level could not result from haste, he says, but only from carelessness or incompetence.

This change in architects may have come at the time when the pyramid was used as an observatory (if that theory is true) if we suppose that the grand gallery was originally temporary, the intention being to reduce it to the size of a regular passage after it had served its purpose. This supposition accounts for its rough walls even though the first architect built it. The first architect was undoubtedly a mathematician and possibly an astrologer. Could it be that, using the pyramid observatory, he cast the king's destiny according to the stars with the same rigid exactness with which he leveled the casing stones and that that destiny was so odious to the king that he replaced the architect with another astrologer-mathematician who was clever rather than careful, finding a favorable message in the stars because that was to his own interest? But of course this is only one possibility among many which would account for the facts.

THE above is more than I intended to write but it is about as brief as it could be and still do justice to the subject matter, especially in the critical part, for of course a mere contradiction of Mr. Mundy's inaccurate statements without giving reasons would be futile. Further, if I did not also take up what I think Mr. Mundy intended to say my argument would not really bear on the subject at all but only on his inaccuracy.

I have taken some pains to check my statements and figures and believe that they can be depended on throughout.

You will undoubtedly agree with me when I say that some sort of correction to Talbot Mundy's misstatements should be published.

Of course I don't want to criticize some one who has no chance to talk back, so I am asking you to forward this, at your own convenience, to Talbot Mundy.—DAVID R. CUMMINS.

San Diego, California.

Dear Mr. Cummins:—Your very interesting letter of September 18th has been forwarded by

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Arthur Hoffman for my abasement and edification, and I am sorry to have kept you waiting several days for an answer. I wished to give it the full attention it deserves.

I may begin by saying that my books are in storage in New York. However, your good faith sticks out all over the letter, so I propose to accept the figures as you give them, taking issue with you only on certain points in connection with them.

I WROTE that Camp-Fire article from memory, having no books of reference at the time available. My purpose was to call attention to the absorbing interest of the Great Pyramid and to cite a few instances that might induce others to investigate. I did not really expect to be challenged as to accuracy (or I would have been more careful); nor did I wish to appear as a disciple of Seiss, or even of Dr. Flinders Petrie. I am far from agreeing with the theories of either of them as to the purpose, date and origin of the Great Pyramid.

My memory is more disgustingly unreliable than a Levantine debtor's, and it seems clear that I made a bad slip in quoting Seiss (in "A Miracle in Stone") as saying the temperature of the Pyramid is the mean between boiling and freezing at the level. Somebody, somewhere, told me that, I suppose, as the priests used to tell things to old Herodotus, and it slipped out like other mistakes. I withdraw the statement and apologize.

THE quotation I gave from Herodotus, as used by *Jimgrim* in the story, was "lifted," if I remember, from Baedeker's "Guide Book of Egypt." But it is quoted verbatim, practically as I used it, in several other books of reference.

I don't believe that Cheops (or Khufu) built the Pyramid. And there certainly never was an underground, or any kind of canal, connecting the Great Pyramid with the Nile; and that for the simple reason that the base of the Pyramid stands too high above Nile high-water level. I used the old legend about a canal as a plot for the story and, knowing water could not flow, without pumping, from the Nile to the Pyramid's base, I let imagination direct the alleged canal elsewhere.

The Pyramid had been built many centuries (at the lowest estimate) before Herodotus set forth on his travels; so the tales he listened to and set down bear no necessary relation to facts that he did not himself observe.

TAKING your objections in order: orientation comes next. I believe I said, and you quote me as saying, "it is the only building in the world that is exactly oriented to the four points of the compass." You say "of course, exact orientation is impossible;" but you offer no proof of that. I am not a mathematician, and am only a dabbler in astronomy and ancient history—have read a very great deal, for instance, and some of it has stuck and seemed acceptable in the course of the screening-out process that our minds undergo when we read.

I understand that the earth's axis is constantly shifting; consequently that the orientation of any given fixed object on the earth's surface changes with the course of centuries—only very gradually and very slightly, it is true, but sufficiently, at least, to account for the 1 min. and 15 secs. by which Seiss admits it is now faulty. And I furthermore maintain that that small error puts the pyramid in a class by itself.

Beyond any doubt, speaking both by book and by personal observation, the Pyramid has been subjected to at least one severe earthquake shock, whose rotary, or semi-rotary motion might account for a displacement of much more than a minute and fifteen seconds. The rock on which it stands is at the northern end of that geological formation, the whole of which might easily have been twisted. In fact, it probably was twisted, as ancient fissures tend to prove.

My point is that the people who built the Great Pyramid—building it for the purpose for which it was intended, and to which I will come presently—knowing as much astronomy as they certainly did—aligning the center of the descending passage, as they did, with Alpha Polaris—and using a scale of accuracy prodigiously finer than anything we moderns can attempt—could, and did, orient the Great Pyramid so accurately as to let the word "exact" pass muster in an article of the sort I wrote in Camp-Fire.

(Understand me, I don't in the least object ot your challenge, or think your attitude unfair. But I give mine as a fair answer.)

MY STATEMENT that the Pyramid gives the weight of the world in tons, and the distance of the earth from the sun in miles, is quoted—accurately, I believe—from "A Miracle in Stone" and from more than one other book. If you are interested I will write for the other books and quote you page and chapter. I did not give them as my own calculation; nor do I know enough mathematics to make the calculation. It is a commonly accepted statement about the Pyramid, interesting if true.

Your next statement—the remainder of that paragraph—I refute, ek dum, pronto, downright, and with emphasis! You say "(even if they did) we could not consider it anything but coincidence, since at the time of the building of the Pyramid the determination of English miles and tons was still 5000 years in the future."

The mile and the ton are not arbitrary measures adopted, like the French metre, out of a blue sky to suit the exigencies of occasion. They are standards legalized (like most other things English) after centuries of custom have proved them to be the most acceptable in use. None knows how ancient they are, but they are certainly not modern.

Supposing they *were* modern, however, you do not prove your case. You might as well say that the Bhagavad Gita had no influence on the Bible, because, when the Bhagavad Gita was written the Bible was at least 5000 years in the future. Seiss, and others, go to great pains to prove that the English inch and the English ton are based on measures in use by the men who built the Pyramid (which is the point) and I have yet to see the claim disproven.

THE other figures I gave, about the relation of the base of the Pyramid to the length of the earth's semi-axis, were from memory—a poor thing, but my own. I intended to quote Seiss again, and if Seiss were alive to murder me, it may be he would do it. But it seems that, for once at any rate I quoted him correctly. Moreover, I don't see why the measurement should not be taken

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from corner socket to corner socket. What difference does it make that the foundations were subsequently covered up? The point is that the builders, knowing certain fundamental truths (in line, no doubt, with Plato's dictum that "God geometrizes") laid their foundation and built their structure in strict proportion to the universal scale. If that isn't true, at least there are scholarly and conscientious men who do believe it.

I CONFESS that my next statement, with which you find fault, is much more difficult to substantiate, or even to argue about. The exact center of the habitable area of the earth is beyond my individual capacity to ascertain, and once more I must "pass the buck" to Seiss, who is at least an enthusiast. He is backed in his assertion by a writer named Redding, and by one other author I have read (but whose name escapes me at the moment)—a man sent out by a British society, who checked up Flinders Petrie's measurements, found fault with some of them, and wrote a very well illustrated book (2 vols.) about it all. My impression is that all three writers took the area of the continents on a map according to Mercator's projection, and measured from that; but that is only an impression, again given from an unreliable memory.

I DO not mean by anything I wrote in Camp-Fire that the English measures, as against the metric, are a preferable standard for modern scientists. That is for modern scientists to say, and they appear to be nearly unanimous in favor of the metric.

Again: my statement that the so-called sarcophagus in the so-called King's chamber of the Pyramid has the same cubical content as the Ark of the Covenant is taken from Seiss and others (Redding included). I don't think you have quoted me correctly in this instance; cubical content, proportion of sides to height etc., and dimensions, are surely not the same thing. What I meant, and what I think Seiss means, is that they would hold an equal quantity of water, if filled to the brim.

1.75 to 2 inches seems to me ample to allow for the thickness of the Ark of the Covenant walls. Modern cabinet-makers would probably need to use interior bracing, but craftsmen of that period, using seasoned hard-wood, or any other wood then in use, were perfectly capable of building such a box without bracing of any kind. They understood morticing and tenon-joints, accuracy, and the use of wooden pegs. Moreover, they were constructing a sacred vessel, and none but the most highly skillfull men would be employed. Thousands of wooden "coffins" made in Egypt at that period, handled and bumped about by "undertakers," and submitted later on to violence by robbers, have lasted until to-day in perfect condition without interior bracing of any kind. And scores of them are hardly any smaller than the Ark of the Covenant. You can't judge ancient skill by modern practise.

I THINK your point about the stone sarcophagus not being carried about in funeral ceremonies is fairly well taken. My point was that the so-called sarcophagus must have been set in place when the Pyramid was being built, but I agree, with you, that does not of itself prove the Pyramid was not intended for a tomb; although I do assert that it never was a tomb or intended to be such.

I don't doubt the ascending passage was blocked with loose stones from overhead; and that might bear out your interesting theory that the Pyramid stood unfinished for a long time—a theory, however, which of itself in turn upsets the tomb one.

I have visited the Great Pyramid more than once, and spent hours in it. Nothing about it appears to me to confirm, or even to suggest, the tomb theory. Why was the great sarcophagus not set in the center of the "King's Chamber?" Why had it no lid? (There is no record whatever of one that I have been able to discover.) Why was there no sarcophagus in the "Queen's chamber?" Why none of the invariable paintings and carvings of a royal sepulcher? Why all the peculiar proportions? Why the constant repetition of sevens and fives in the construction? Why the alignment of the descending passage with Alpha Polaris?

I HAVE in front of me a paper by Mr. Fred. J. Dick, a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, who draws attention to (1921) recent discoveries of Maya antiquities in Guatemala. He refers particularly to the "Great Dragon of Quirigua" and its calculable age.. If he is right, then the age of the Great Pyramid must be set back many thousands of years before Cheops' time. Nothing connects Cheops with the Pyramid except certain red quarry marks, said to be done in paint on one side of certain stones in the "chambers of construction." I have not seen them, but have been assured they are there.

In another paper, called "Ancient Astronomy in Egypt and its Significance," by the same Mr. Dick, he says "the Grand Gallery of the Pyramid was in ancient times known as the Hall of the Orbit." It represented the earth's orbital plane; with the orbits of the seven planets indicated on the walls, the thirty-six decans of the zodiac indicated on the roof, and the twenty-seven lunar mansions indicated on the ramps.

NOW I am quoting again. "The ascending passage to the Hall of the Orbit is inclined to the horizon at 26.7°, while the Hall of the Orbit is at 26.21°. It is probable . . . . that the latitude of the axis of the Great Pyramid was then precisely 30., which is one and a third minutes of arc only, more than is now the case. It would follow that at the date when the Great Pyramid was originally projected or commenced, the obliquity of the ecliptic was 33.53°, while at about the time of the completion of the work, the obliquity had diminished to 33.39°, corresponding to the interval of about 1,500 years."

This would account for Flinders Petrie's observations of deterioration of workmanship in the higher levels, since, if it took all that time building, later generations might have forgotten the more ancient skill. My own belief is that the Pyramid is too hoary with age for its age to be reckoned by any method based on latter-day knowledge. I believe it was built by the same race of men who carved the Guatemala dragon, and who (or whose contemporaries) built the pyramids and other titanic structures of South America.

I think the men who built it were the keepers of the ancient Mysteries, whose science was all bound up with astronomy, of which they knew much more than we do. If I am right, then the so-called

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sarcophagus in the "King's Chamber" used to be filled with water for the final ceremony of the initiation. The aspirant, having completed his course of trials (which were tragically fierce) stepped into it, was immersed, and stepped out again "reborn."

I think the Pyramid was closed up, and made as inaccessible as possible, at the time when the Mysteries fell on evil days and were no longer observable, perhaps because of invasion of the country, or because of royal jealousy, or for any other of a thousand possible reasons.

In all likelihood the hierophants intended to resume the celebration of the Mysteries at some future date, which, however, never came. The sacred nature of the building of itself would serve to prevent forcible intrusion until, in course of centuries, such legends as Herodotus set down accumulated and were accepted as fact.

IT HAS been a very great pleasure to answer your letter, and if there are any points I have omitted, or any details that you consider insufficiently taken up, I would be happy to correspond with you. I don't place much reliance on Seiss and his interpretations, except in so far that history repeats itself in cycles; and the ancients, understanding cosmic laws that are as a sealed book to most men living to-day, could not express their knowledge in form and symbol without indicating in advance the peaks and depressions, so to speak, of future human history. But that subject is so vast, and its room for possible debate so illimitable, that it seems wiser to leave it untouched. (If you are interested I can indicate some books that dive into the matter.)—TALBOT MUNDY.

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SOME time ago at Camp-Fire I wished for a man like William Allen White for President. Judging from the letters that came in, there are many more of you who'd like to see that type of man at the head of our Government and all through it. The type who thinks first and always of the country's interests, not those of some political party; who works for all the people, not for any class or section of them; who understands the real meaning of democracy, believes in democracy and is absolutely unafraid.

One of you who wrote in suggested George W. Goethals, saying he had been appointed to his Panama Canal work by a Republican and offered a high office of New York City by the Democrats. The comrade didn't know whether Goethals is a Republican, Democrat or what and, to be frank, neither do I. Nor do I care. He looks to me like a man who is a man and, so far as I know his public service, he's the kind I'd gladly vote for for President. As the comrade said, he "practises Americanism."

Another of you suggested Herbert Hoover. I do no know to what extent, if any, Hoover has become identified with a party. He would seem of the type I have in mind. Another suggested Admiral Sims. I am not competent to judge. Certainly I know nothing against his integrity and certainly he is unafraid. I might add also the name of Brand Whitlock.

It is not any particular man that I'm interested in, but in the type of man. Like most Americans I'm sick to death of seeing "party men" nominated by those other party men who run the political parties and allow us to choose among four or five hand-picked specimens all of whom were chosen because it was believed they could do their respective parties most good.

What we need is a new system of choosing candidates for the presidency, a system that allows the people themselves to do the choosing. The electoral college has become such an empty farce that most of us, even at election time, forget there is such a thing and not one man in ten thousand knows who the electors are or needs to know. The conventions of the political parties come under the head of criminal practical jokes played on the public. They're exceedingly criminal, infinitely practical and a lower form of humor than the pun. But we swallow them just the same.

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THIS request was written some time ago, but maybe a letter will still reach comrade McLane at Salt Lake City. Here's hoping. The request ought to have gone into "Lost Trails" long ago instead of into our Camp-Fire cache. Office machinery slipped. I'm sorry.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

I wonder if you would "stand for" one breaking in on the bunch for a more or less selfish reason? I am one of the class of ramblers known as "boomers."

Like many other seasonal workers I have been in all sorts of places and up against many peculiar propositions. Have tried my hand at nearly any class of work one could think of, but somehow I always seemed to lack the "savey" necessary to success. In my drifting around in thirty-five States of the Union I have been favored and assisted by hundreds of folks of all classes.

If any of these who may have known me as "Pat," "Mac," "Crip," "Shorty," "Red the Rambler," read this, will they please write me at General Delivery, Salt Lake City.—A. MCLANE.

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DON'T forget that the originals of most of our cover paintings are for sale to the highest bidders. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered. Covers may be bid for at any time. They will be sent to the highest bidders express collect on or about the first of July.—A. S. H.

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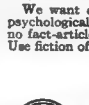


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## Addresses

**Camp-Fire**—Any one belongs who wishes to.

**Rifle Clubs**—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)



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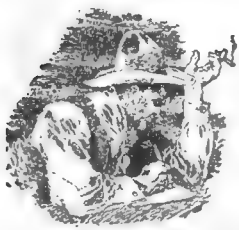
## Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

**1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters**
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

**2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

**3. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section*).

**4. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

**5. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa**
TOM L. MILLS, *Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

**6. South Sea Islands Part 2**
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 313 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

**7. ★ Australia and Tasmania**
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

**8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java**
PAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

**9. ★ New Guinea**
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

**10. Philippine Islands**
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

**11. Hawaiian Islands and China**
P. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

**12. Japan**
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

**13. Asia Part 1 Southern**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with five cents—in Mr. Mills' and Mr. Armit's cases eight cents—in stamps NOT attached*)



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**14. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan**
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

**15. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters**
CAPTAIN C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure*. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

**16. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria**
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

**17. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.**
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

**18. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand**
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

**19. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East**
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**20. Africa Part 5 Morocco**
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

**21. Africa Part 6 Tripoli**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

**22. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria**
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

**23. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan**
W. T. MOFFAT, Sudan Customs, Sinkat, Red Sea Province, Sudan. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

**24. Turkey and Asia Minor**
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**25. Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania**
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**26. Albania and Greece**
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, care of American Consul, Gottenborg, Sweden. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

**27. Scandinavia**
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, care of American Consul, Gottenborg, Sweden. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

**28. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland**
FRED F. FLEISCHER, 426 15th St., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

**29. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile**
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

**30. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina**
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

**31. Central America**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

**32. Mexico Part 1 Northern**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

**33. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California**
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 182, Salinas, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

**34. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec**
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**35. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario**
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**36. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario**
GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**37. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District**
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

**38. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta**
ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

**39. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin**
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**40. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec**
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**41. Alaska**
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1436 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

**42. Baffinland and Greenland**
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

**43. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.**
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**44. Western U. S. Part 2 Colo. and Wyo.**
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

**45. Western U. S. Part 3 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains**
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

**46. Western U. S. Part 4. Idaho and Surrounding Country**
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

**47. Western U. S. Part 5 Tex. and Okla.**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

**48. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.**
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

**49. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.**
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

**50. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan**
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

**51. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River**
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river

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steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

**52. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks**

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

**53. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers**

HOWARD A. SHANNON, 310 International Bldg., Washington, D. C. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

**54. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.**

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**55. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine**

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

### A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

### B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

### C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

### D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800**, Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

### E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

### F.—Tropical Forestry

DR. H. N. WHITFORD, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilties; distribution, exploration, etc.

## G.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire** Stations write J. COX, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S. and its possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash, D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

**National parks**, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

### The White Business Man in Japan

HOW he gets around—and gets the orders:

*Question:*—"Arrangements are being considered for my becoming the special representative in Japan for a large Canadian firm.

I desire to know beforehand as much as possible about that country, particularly regarding such subjects as commerce, agriculture, the people and their customs and geography and traveling facilities, or anything that might be useful in my work as special representative meeting officials of business firms and of the country in all circumstances.

My residence there may be for only a few months but is more likely to extend over several years.

I shall certainly appreciate whatever information that you can give me and will enclose ten cents to cover postage on any mail you may wish to send me."—H. S. BALSON, Toronto, Can.

*Answer*, by Mrs. Knudson:—You will find traveling facilities in Japan rather easy to get the hang of when you are once on the spot, for they do not differ so very materially from conditions in our own country. English is spoken to such an extent in all the larger coast commercial centers that one has small difficulty in getting about.

Even a dozen years ago we used to get hold of a rickshaw boy who knew some English and keep him by the day at a nominal charge. Now even more boys speak English and can act as both guide and interpreter upon occasion.

However, a courier-interpreter is the better to depend upon, and such a man is not to be confused with a guide. Guides are fine, too, for the uninitiated, but will be looked upon everywhere more as servants—that is, from the native point of view. A courier is a higher-class man, and a rickshaw boy has more the status of our own newsboy.

Rates for any such boys or men can be had from any hotel clerk—you will find the clerks all obliging and helpful. The tourist agencies are also sources of information and help to the stranger in Japan. Chief amongst these is Cook's, of course.

Get the Oriental advertising matter and what information you can from your Canadian Pacific

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Ocean Services, Ltd. (C. P. O. S.) C. E. Benjamin, Passenger Traffic Manager, 141 St. James Street, Montreal. Then if I were you I'd invest five dollars in Terry's "Guide to the Japanese Empire." If your own bookstores do not have it send to Orientalia, 22 East Sixtieth Street, New York City.

If you make headquarters in Yokohama, as you doubtless will, put up for a few days at one of the larger hotels. Then if you find that more expensive than you desire, there are a number of English and American boarding-houses on The Bluff—the English residential section of the city. Hotels Pleasanton and Belmont are smaller hotels, both under American management.

For help in business you would do well to get "put up" for the Yokohama United Club, a well-known international club. The standing of your business firm would doubtless recommend you to some resident club member. A large part of Japan's foreign business is done socially and centers about the clubs, hotels and athletic fields.

The Grand Hotel might be called the social center of the Far East.

Finally—patience and politeness gather more dollars in the Oriental countries than do our own direct and sometimes brusk business methods. You can not hurry the East, even in their business transactions.

The high-class Japanese business man is honest but shrewd, and polished in manner. Respect his methods, weigh well and analyze his seemingly light proposals and meet his polish with a straightforward affability, and you will in the end make a friend for yourself and a customer for your house.

***The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.***

### Ships' Rigs

ALSO directions to the source-book of information on some little-known islands:

*Question:*—"Taking advantage of the columns of *Adventure*, I desire the following information, and enclose herewith ten cents U. S. currency for postage.

I would like a short description or explanation of the terms sloop, schooner, snow, brig, brigantine, bark, barkentine and full ship. The terms may be semitechnical if the average layman can understand them.

I very much desire information about the Seychelles, Keeling or Cocos Island, the Crozers, Kerguelen, St. Paul's, Amsterdam Island; as to inhabitants if any, trade, climate and transportation facilities, as this data can not be obtained from ordinary sources.

Also anything referring to Madagascar and the French régime there. This seems to be a place large enough and important enough to attract attention, but of which little is known.

My own peculiar wanderings have taken me to nearly every other place than the Indian Ocean or its islands. I saw your data in reference to the Andamans and Nicobar Islands and thought you might be able to inform me on a similiar line."—PERCY A. HILL, Nueva Ecija, Philippines.

*Answer*, by Capt. Dingle:—Adequately to answer your letter much more space is required than a letter. While your queries come within my section of "Ask Adventure," I must remind you that the service scarcely admits of satisfactory replies to such sweepingly wide questions. It rather aims to answer specific questions on certain points of some part of a section. Your questions call for more than one full book.

However, to do what I can:

A sloop is a single-masted sailing-vessel having no forestay, but having a single jib-stay which comes down to the end of the bowsprit. There were formerly ships in naval service called sloops of war, but I take it you refer to the sloop as a rig, and as such I have answered the query.

A schooner may have any number of masts from two upward, and in general every mast is rigged with fore-and-aft sails. The English topsail schooner has usually double square topsails on the foremast.

A snow is an obsolete rig, so far as I know. To the best of my knowledge it was similar to the hermaphrodite brig, which was a full brig in all respects except that it carried no square mainsail. It had a fore spencer.

A brig has two masts, both fully square-rigged.

A brigantine can have but two masts, and the foremast is square-rigged, as a full-rigged brig's, with topgallant sail and usually a royal. The main mast is fore-and-aft rig.

A bark or barque (correctly) has at least three masts, but may have four or five or more. The distinction is that all except the aftermast of these masts is square-rigged. The aftermast is fore-and-aft rigged.

A barkentine or barquentine has at least three masts, the foremost one of which is fully square-rigged, as a brig's or barque's.

A full-rigged ship must have at least three masts, *all* of which must be square-rigged.

As for the rest of your queries, they cover so much ground and are of so general a nature that I must in self-defense simply refer you to standard sources of such information. I suggest that you secure such volumes of the United States Hydfographic Office publications as I indicate. You will find them at the store of the Luzon Stevedoring Company, Manila.

Looking through my list of islands, I find that all the places you seek to know about excepting Keeling or Cocos Island are well dealt with in one volume, viz.: "South Indian Ocean Pilot."

This is Hydrographic Office Publication Number 161 and should not cost more than ninety cents.

Keeling Island I think will be found in Volume Number — I can not find any record of this volume. I have searched my entire library.

I suggest you simply ask to be allowed to see the volumes touching Australia north and west coasts, and seek in the index for the one which included Keeling. I believe it will be found in the Pilot covering Bay of Bengal. That is the H. O. Number 160, same price as the other one. But I am not sure about this one. If you can not get to the store yourself, but have to write for the books, write first to the manager asking him to look it up for you.

Sorry this is one bit of information I can not give you. I can tell you a little of the place from personal knowledge of several years ago, but it will be far more satisfactory to you if you do as I suggest above.

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### The Bite of the Russell's Viper

THE dictionary says that the other name of this snake is the jessur, and locates its habitat as Asia. Mr. Emerson however locates it in South America; and as he lived all over that continent for many years as a mining engineer he ought to know:

*Question:*—"Is the bite of the snake called a cobra, fatal always? Is there no medicine that can be given promptly to save a life in such a case?"—CHAS. ZONE, Santa Cruz, Calif.

*Answer*, by Mr. Emerson:—The bite of a cobra or deadly Russell's viper of South America is no longer dangerous, if the victim is promptly vaccinated with the serum of the snake that did the biting; the snakes are compelled to strike aseptic gauze, thus depositing their poison. The poison is taken from the gauze and diluted with sugar of milk and then injected into a horse.

More than 5,000 tubes of this vaccin have been distributed in South American countries.

***If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.***

### Homesteads of Cariboo and Fort Francis

BRITISH COLUMBIA still has inducements to tempt the settler:

*Question:*—"I want to apologize for pesticating you with these questions, which may be a little out of your province; and before I ask them I want to thank you in advance for the information.

Is there any agricultural land in central British Columbia open to homestead entry that is worth anything? If I could raise hay and the hardier vegetables and get away with the sheep and cattle game would it be O. K.?

Where is it, and how much brush and timber is there on it if any, and what kind of brush or timber?

Would my honorable discharge from the U. S. Regular Army showing a year in France and that I was through the Argonne Forest battle be worth anything to me up there as regard taking up land?

I can do any kind of farm work, including mule-skinning, cowpunching, sheep-herding and handling any kind of farm machinery or farm stock. Am also a hard-rock man. Could I get work usually? And generally speaking, about what wages are paid for such work?"—DONALD E. MARTIN, Salmon, Idaho.

*Answer*, by Mr. Carson:—I am sending you a booklet showing the location of homestead land in B. C., and also giving you a synopsis of the land laws and so forth. There is some mighty good land in the Cariboo district and in the Fort Francis district, and if you will write the Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C., he will send you a map and other data concerning these locations.

As for your honorable discharge from the U. S. regular army and so forth, say nothing about it. Remember that British Columbia sent over a third of her boys to the front and that a large proportion of them are there yet. What we did in the late war was nothing when compared to the mighty efforts put forth by Canada in general and B. C. in particular. Of course if you happen across some fellow who was in the same mixup it would do no harm to mention that you had been there as well; but for the love of —— don't go over there singing any of that "we won the war" stuff.

As to employment, there is always a chance for a willing man in a new country; but, being unacquainted with you and your abilities, I would not dare assure you of employment. I can only say that I never saw the time when there was not a job of some sort sticking around, so you need have no fears on that score.

### Mauser Automatics

SOMETHING else that needs to return to pre-war normalcy:

*Question:*—"Will you please give me some information on the Mauser automatic pistol? I do not mean the Mauser that is best known—the big 15-inch one; but the smaller 32-caliber pocket model. Is it very powerful, and does it beat the Colt or Savage or other well-known guns of the same caliber?"—WM. BARFOOT, Portland, Ore.

*Answer*, by Mr. Wiggins:—The pre-war Mauser pistols were nice little guns, but of too small caliber to be practical. They were in the pocket models, of .25 and .32 calibers (foreign sizes were called 6.5MM and 8 MM) and were a well-finished little pistol.

But the stuff that's being peddled now is unspeakably poor, looking as if it had been finished with a rasp and working very roughly. I would not care for one at any price.

They are no more powerful than a Colt or Savage using the same cartridge, and are not nearly of such good material and workmanship. They are being produced and sold as cheaply as possible by some importing firms in the Eastern States, and are not worth the money asked for them, in my opinion. Leave them alone, I would advise. Colt, Savage and Remington are the best automatics made in my humble opinion. And I've experimented with about all of them.

***When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.***

### America's Last Frontier

SEEMS we'd like to hear more of that "outlaw king" referred to in the subjoined letter from Bro. Liebe. Maybe we shall at that—if not in the course of his "A.A." work, then in fiction form:

*Question:*—"I would be thankful for following information *re* the 10,000 islands section of southwestern Florida. Many refined and reliable people have told of the wonderful fishing—of catching 100 to 300 pounds of sheepshead and other small pan or food fish on and a few feet off shore among the islands in a day with just cane pole and fiddler bait; and tell of turning them in to the local fish houses at night but, being out for the fun, they did

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not mention what these fish are worth at the fish houses.

Are there as many islands as stated and mostly unoccupied and dry enough to camp on?

Are fish, game, coconuts, shellfish, etc., about as plentiful as people say in that section?

Are there fish houses there, and about what is paid a pound for sheepshead and such fish on an average, or some little idea of prices? Am told two to six cents a pound.

Names of one or two places in the islands where a sick fellow could fish with line and sell on the ground as above.

How about health conditions, snakes and pests? Judge conditions would be good on a small island.

One could surely earn at least seventy-five cent to a dollar a day with a line and have some fun, could he not?

Could lumber be had there to put up a tiny Summer house?

Is this a perfectly peaceable and safe place as to negroes or rough people?

Could a fellow pick weather to go there in a good boat of 18 to 20 feet from Fort Myers, or go around from Jacksonville by Key West?

Is weather as treacherous on both east and west coasts as many make it out to be?

Understand almost no people are living right among 10,000 Islands. Is this correct?."—DOUGLAS SHERWOOD, Otty Glen, N. B., Can.

*Answer*, by Mr. Liebe:—It seems to me that there are more than 10,000 of the Ten Thousand Islands! Most of them are simply mud and mangroves on oyster-bars. Very few have sand beaches and are dry enough to camp on.

Fish, game and shell-fish are plentiful, but coconuts are not. The hidden Cabbage Bay on Lostman's River beats anything I have ever seen for fishing, especially for tarpon, rovalia or snook, and cavelle or jackfish. I know only one man that can find Cabbage Bay (named that because of a group of cabbage-palms that grow on one shore); his name is E. J. Hamilton; he lives at Porpoise Point, on Wood Key; his post-office is Chokoloskee, Lee Co., Fla. Most of the islands are separated by creeks or runs (salt-water); the man who ventures far in there without a guide is quickly lost.

The few people who live in there do the fishing; an outsider would have little chance, except for sport—they wouldn't object to that as they would to commercial fishing. There are no fish houses; a refrigerator-boat comes either from Tampa or Key West and collects the fish. The price depends upon the market, varies, and is always low.

A sick man down there fishing with any kind of tackle, depending upon fishing for a livelihood, would be badly out of luck.

Health conditions would be fine *if* one drank good water (all the water you'll get in that country is rainwater) and didn't let mosquitoes bite him.

Lumber to build a house? There isn't any. Your house would have to be made of palm-thatch, which isn't mosquito-proof. There are more mosquitoes there to the square inch than anywhere else I've ever been. Without a netted-in or screened-in place to stay at night, they'd kill you.

I never saw any snakes in the islands, but I've killed rattlers just inland from there.

Is it peaceable and safe so far as negroes and rough people are concerned? I never had any trouble in there. But there are people living in that section that I would very much dislike to cross—"big, blue-eyed men who walk the sands barefoot with rifles in their hands."

There is no law. This is—at least it has been called—"America's last frontier." It is the end of things, a back o' beyond, a sort of never-never land. There was an outlaw king who lived in those islands once; his life story is more thrilling than a blood-and-thunder novel.

Yes, you can go down the coast from Fort Myers in an eighteen foot boat if the man who runs it knows the coast and if the weather is good. Boat and boatman will cost you from $5 to $10 per day. It's too far from Jacksonville. Ordinarily the weather is not treacherous, but very fine.

Not many people living there, to be sure. Not many places for them to live!

Finally, don't go down there without sufficient funds to carry you; and don't go alone. The Gulf has been full of whisky-runners for a long time, and some of them are real bad.

***"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.***

### House-Boat Dimensions

AS FOR local restrictions on hunting, I venture to supplement Brother Zerr's advice by suggesting that the inquirer write the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for a digest of game-laws:

*Question*:—"Am planning trip down Mississippi and would appreciate your answering following questions:

What beam house-boat do you consider best for boat 26 to 28 feet in length?

What size open boat, hull, length and beam and power, do you think best suited for towing above?

What is your personal preference in regard to make of engine, and why?

Made trip, Alton to Memphis, last year in 35-foot cruiser, but too expensive for me. Had fine time, and Island 34-35 was goose paradise. But I know little to nothing about shanty (house) boats and two-cylinder open gas boats."—R. D. WESTLAKE, Virden, Ill.

*Answer*, by Mr. Zerr:—You ask what beam house-boat. According to a local boat-builder, about 8 to 10 feet beam for a length of 26 to 28 feet; a little longer would be better with the same width for beam.

As to the open boat hull, why not get a steamboat yawl, say 26 feet long by 4 feet wide, with a 6 to 10 horse-power engine?

I could not and will not recommend any make, as this must rest with you. Furthermore there are so many makes, and each kind has its own merits.

Be sure to get equipped with a good tow-line, as you will need it during October.

Wish you a good time. Don't get in wrong with the hunting-laws, which vary in each State. Better keep posted on this. And another thing: Be sure of having good planks on the bottom of the boat, well calked.

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# LOST TRAILS

**Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.**

VIA, DELLMAN H. (Known as D. H. Via.) Left Lexington, Mo. in 1900 or 1902. Tall, dark hair, gray eyes, was telegraph operator for Missouri Pacific and M. K. T. Railroad. Had met with an accident and is probably a cripple. When last seen was walking on crutches and was patient at M. K. T. hospital, in Sedalia, Mo. Any information would be appreciated by his daughter.—Address DAISY C. MUNOZ, 148 S. Hazel, Stockton, California.

GRAHAM, L. B. Wireless operator, ex-navy man. Former jockey. Last heard of on S. S. *Narcissus.* Write an old matey.—"SLEUTH."

FORMAN, J. B. Ex-navy man. Former cowpuncher. Last heard of in Calif. Hospital in 1920. "How" old timer. Got Villa yet? Drop me a line.

WOOD, CARL HERBERT. Merchant Marine. Last heard from was on S. S. *Nantahala* for South American ports. Have been advised that he was paid off in N. Y. April 19, 1921, and did not re-ship. Any information will be appreciated.—Address D. HERBERT WOOD, 262 Washington St., Boston, Mass.

WILL all men who served overseas with the 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion please send their names and addresses to CAPT. W. L. GIBSON, 50 James St., South, Hamilton, Ontario.

ENNIS, HENRY. Resident of Portland, Oregon. Age fourteen. Last heard of was beating his way between Laramie and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Any information would be appreciated by his mother.—Address J. M. LEEDIM, 1005 E. 36th St., N. Portland, Oregon.

WOOLERY or the WICKWIRE family. Lived after the Civil War at Blue Earth, Minnesota, or Mankato, Winnebago County. Or the Sink of the Humboldt, Ill. Any information will be appreciated by their sister Jenny.—Address HARRY MARTIN, 2027 Derant St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

SAILOR, BOB. Employed by the Indianapolis Street Railway Co. in 1919. Left for St. Louis. Please write.—Address No. 247.

TATE, THOMAS. Employed by the Indianapolis Street Railway Co. Believed to have gone to Cleveland, Ohio, in the latter part of the year 1921. George would like to hear from you. Please write.—Address No. 247.

ELLIS, WALTER S. Medical Corps, Edgewood Arsenal, Edgewood, Md. Please write.—Address No. 247.

WILSON, PRIVATE EDGAR. Lately discharged from barracks at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Please write.—Address No. 247.

C. L. W. of Ft. Clayton, Panama. Please write again, as your other letter was destroyed by fire.—Address No. 446, care of *Adventure.*

CHAPMAN, FREDERICK WILSON. Information and present address wanted.—Address WIFE, care of *Adventure.*

DAVIS, RALPH E. Resident of Emporia, Kansas. Enlisted in regular army in 1916. Last heard of in Syracuse, New York, with Company "B", 50th Infantry in 1917. Any information will be appreciated.—Address T. L. PORTER, Box 91, Upper Bingham Canyon, Utah.

YOUNG, JOY. Last heard of in San Francisco, September, 1922. Has been in Canada, may be there now. Is oil field worker. Any information will be appreciated.—Address T. L. PORTER, Box 91, Upper Bingham Canyon, Utah.

HAYNIE, THOMAS SEXTON. Born in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. Son of Thomas S. and Eliza Brown Haynie. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. LILY BELLE HAYNIE, 815 Broadway Bldg., Portland, Oregon.

ADAMS, LYDIA, LETHIA and MYRTLE. Any information will be appreciated by their sisters.—Address MRS. FLORA WEBB, Route 6, Box 523, Tulsa, Okla.

PERRY, ROBERT R. Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan, in March, 1921. Age thirty-seven, light hair, blue eyes, five feet seven inches tall, weighs about 140 pounds. Is partly bald. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. MARY A. PERRY, South Newbury, Vermont.

WASHINGTON, G. H. Formerly 108305 Canadian Exp. Forces, may be communicated with by writing to—P. O. Box 102, Westwood, Calif.

LYSOE, META M. Wife of John L. Lysoe. Age thirty-two, medium height, blonde hair, gray eyes. Last heard from in Scottsdale, Arizona. Mother is ill. Any information will be appreciated by her brothers.—Address WALBERT W. KOEMPFER, Rising City, Nebraska.

MCPHERSON, NORMAN. Everything O. K. with us. Nothing to fear. Am writing you General Delivery, Forth Worth, Texas. Please write.—Address Box 99, Angusville, Manitoba, Canada.

HOLLY, GEO. Any information will be appreciated by their sister.—Address A. HOLLY, Emmett, Idaho.

BENNETT, HOWARD. Please write. Mother is heartbroken, but understands all.—SISTER MARY.

LOCKE, CHARLES F. Please write your brother. Important. You can get me either in care of the W. E. where you formerly worked or at home.—J.

NAPIER, HARRY (also known as Harry Sanford). Left his home near Charleston, West Virginia, about fifteen years ago for the West. Last heard of in the U. S. Army at Spokane, Washington, in 1913. Was also supposed to have worked on cattle ranch in Montana or Idaho in 1910-11. Any information will be appreciated by his cousins.—Address MRS. JULIA PENROD, Box 116, Oak Hill, Fayett Co., W. Virginia.

MCGEE, MARTIN. Last heard of in January, 1920, at Anchorage, Alaska. Your sister would like to hear from you.—Address M. MCGEE, care of *Adventure.*



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**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

EVANS, JAMES BOOTH. Please write to your son. Everything O. K.—Address RAY EVANS, 126 E. Cucharras St., Colorado Springs, Colo.

FRENCH, DEWIGHT. Last heard of in hospital at Rochester, N. Y. Six feet tall, dark complection. Any information will be appreciated by his sisters.—Address MRS. IRENE SMITH, 412 N. McLellah St., Bay City, Michigan.

BILDOG, MORGAN. Comrade in 1916-17. Write One-Ida at once. Our old ticket seller and pianist want to hear from you. Send some word, I'll know it's you.—Address SERGT. DURFEE.

SEATON, JAMES ARTHUR. Was soldier in Australian Army, served in France, was discharged in Adelaide. Is supposed to have come to San Francisco, Calif. in 1920. Age twenty-six, six feet two inches tall, fair complection, blue eyes and auburn hair. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. C. U. SEATON, Port Townsend, Wash.

CAMPBELL, FRED C. Please write or come.—Address HARRY CAMPBELL, Gen. Delivery, Little Rock, Ark.

MURDAUGH, ROY H. Height five feet ten inches, 175 pounds, age thirty-eight, dark complection, white hair, florist by trade. Last seen in Milwaukee, February, 1922. Supposed to have started for California. Any information will be appreciated by his father.—Address J. H. MURDAUGH, Croswell, Michigan.

LANE, JAMES A. Last heard of in Lets Flying Field, Washington, D. C., Sept. 1, 1922. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 451, care of *Adventure*.

MCWILLIAMS, WALTER. Son of Mattice Ferguson McWilliams and James McWilliams. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T. 452, care of *Adventure*.

"SHUN" DUKE SHELTON, Victor Alvin, Moe Henery, Devlin (97), Kelley, Lynch (Honolulu) fall out and report to W. A. B. "The Old Man," 1831 San Pablo Ave., Oakland, Calif.

BAKER, H. W. (Scissorbill) Baker, Speaker and Wiggin want to hear from you.

W. V. M. Old pal please write.—Address HARLEY E. ROGERS, 1201 Gough St., San Francisco, Calif.

SAMUEL MERTON H. Your buddy of Manilla wants to hear from you. At present is in durance vile. He has the packages left at Army Service Club. Willett D. is looking for you. Write W. D. at the old address in Maryland. Write your buddy.—Address WALLACE D. BARTLETT, 623 N. Adams St., Ypsilanti, Michigan.

**THE following have been inquired for in either the February 28th or April 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:**

ALLEN PRESCOTT C.; Bartell, O.; Berking, Joe; Bradford, Robert and Lewis; Cornish, Charles, Jr.; Crispt, Lizzie; Dickson, Ted Jr.; Dunn, Paul A.; Elam, Richard; Frost, James and J. Hopping; Forde, Joseph Patrick; Gilday, John E.; Grady, Nellie Mrs. (*née* Nellie McCarthy); Grasme, Erwin; Graves, James Franklin; Gray, Harry; Haigh, Ward Percy; Hanks, Marion R.; Henderson, Helen; Hennon, Ralph; Hicks, Ester; Hutler, Reginald; Kilian, Gustave; Lamb, Frank; Latchford, Ed.; MacDonald, Malcom; McFee or Goodier; McGuire, Benjamin; O'Rourke, Edward; Priest, Francis E. or Julia Priest; Russell, Robert Lawrence; Siple, William B.; Smith, Charles; Smith, Lester M.; Van Dyke, Peter; Williams, Joe; Williams, Grant, B.; Womble, Benjamin Franklin:

MISCELLANEOUS—Conger, "Yank" Harris, Locke or any A. B.'s of "Buckeye State"; J. C. S.; L. W.; Texas Jack, Slushy, Andy O'Brien, Kelly, Ted Leeds, Mike or any of the crew of the Bowhead Whaling Schooner *Era*.

**MAIL received during the current month is held by Adventure for following persons, who may obtain it by sending present address and proof of identity.**

MAIL—Mr. Davis; Fuller, A. E.; Hooker, W. F.; Lassen, Paul Jones.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at the address given us do not reach you. Address care of *Adventure*.


# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## MAY 10TH ISSUE

**Besides the four complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:**

**THE GREAT DUGANO** — *Norman Springer*
The chanteyman "boosts the hooker along."

**SCARS OF CONCEIT** — *Frederick J. Jackson*
The sheriff and his deputy are both good shots.

**SLUG 33** — *Ramsey Benson*
The type-setter was a liar, but——

**WHEN FATE GRINNED** — *John T. Rowland*
Two men in a sinking boat.

**RED AUTUMN A Five-Part Story Part III** — *Hugh Pendexter*
Force interplays with intrigue to obtain Indian support in the War of 1812.

**THE LEGIONNAIRE** — *Gerald B. Breitigam*
A duel between the lines.

**THE BLUNDERER** — *J. D. Newsom*
Cattle-rustling in New Caledonia.


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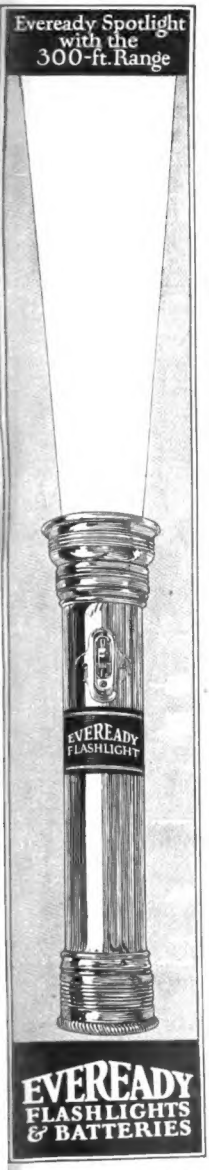

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